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"We're Telling Each Other Stories All The Time": Narrative
and Working-Class Women's Writing

in Two Volumes

Volume One

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Summary

The written word is one important way through which people come to think about themselves and the world they live in. Reading and writing are experiences which are both personal and political. They are closely connected to the development of a sense of self. In order to explore the specific ways in which this development takes place, and the possibilities offered by particular literary genres, I interviewed four working-class women writers about their reading and writing histories from childhood onwards. I use these interviews to construct a series of case studies, each of which allows me to focus on a different genre or area of concern, expressed by the writer herself, and examine in detail the specific identifications and pleasures it offers. In doing so I use a reformulated reader-response criticism to analyse the ways in which these women use reading and writing to make sense of the world and of themselves, and to create meaning. I argue that the value of reader-based criticism lies in its ability to account for the uses made of texts by individual, historically-situated readers.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations and symbols have been used in the transcripts and quoted in the text:-

Laughter	[L]
Pause	[P]
Rustling of paper	[R]
Self-interruption	[.]
Silence while reading	[S]
Word or words unclear	[?]
Um, er, etc., voice trails off	[...]
Background noise edited	[.....]

Preface

This thesis has its roots in personal experience. As a feminist, I believe this to be important, since it represents a working out of the idea that the personal is political. Rebecca O'Rourke and Janet Batsleer argue that this notion "links with narrative and story-telling, because it invokes a speaking subject exploring actions, cause and effect" [1987:37]. More directly, the thesis grew out of a need to make sense of particular experiences of reading and writing. These are personal and private activities which are also highly political: "even activities as apparently simple and fundamental as reading and writing are, in capitalist society, at one and the same time, forms of regulation and exploitation and potential modes of resistance, celebration and solidarity" [Batsleer et al. 1985:5].

My own set of formative reading and writing experiences began when, as a child, I was considered to be "good at English": with a sizeable number of other little girls I enjoyed reading and writing as hobbies [Newson & Newson 1978:119-123]. I somehow "grew out of" this phase, until as an angst-ridden teenager, I began to write poetry. Some years later I became aware that there were not only personal, but also political implications to who wrote what, for whom, and what happened to it (and them) when they did. I trained as an adult literacy tutor and joined a writers' workshop. This involvement led to my being

asked to run workshops for the University of Liverpool. In these groups, in which I was either participant or tutor, discussion often centred on the questions of what was "good" writing, what made authentic working-class writing, was women's writing different to men's.

Some of the women on Merseyside decided to form a separate group, complementary (they felt) to the mixed workshop in their area. They believed that otherwise they did not have the space to produce the writing they wanted. The magazine they published was a shock to many, myself included, consisting of romantic, sentimental and humorous stories and poems. Many people questioned the need for a separate group producing "that kind" of writing. Later I was to realise that my surprise stemmed from two sources: first, a failure to listen closely to what the women had been saying, and second, a confusion between the terms "women" and "feminist". To me, a separatist group was one which was likely to generate feminist writing; to the women concerned it was a place to create pieces for themselves, the kind of writing in which men were not interested, or of which they were openly derisory.

These experiences helped to disrupt some of my cherished "truths" and push me into an attitude of questioning "women's writing", rather than simply campaigning for it. So, when looking at Women's Studies programmes, I chose one that promised to focus on women's writing. I ended my M.A. year with a great many more questions than I had

started out with.

One issue which came increasingly to preoccupy me was what could be described as "literary influence". I was struck, when thinking about conversations with women in the groups I attended, by the certainty with which they spoke when describing the "good" poem as one which rhymed. With little or no "literary" education, where had this idea come from? How could its persistence be explained in a time when free verse was in ascendancy? Did the answer lie in reading? How else might reading, listening, watching, provide models for writing? Did they also provide ways of thinking about the self? This idea had particular resonance for me, since I had spent several years of my adolescence "being" Tess of the D'Urbervilles, battling bravely though hopelessly against fate. This script was replaced by the autobiography of Simone de Beauvoir, though by this time I had sufficient grasp of politics to realise that though I was Catholic, I was not upper-middle class, and that this did make a difference to the story.

It is unusual for the roots of an idea concerning "good poetry" or a "good story" to lie in a single, consciously known place. They are built up slowly, over time, as we come to grasp the "rules" of the various literary "games". Viewers of soap operas are rarely conscious of themselves as holders of knowledge, engaged in an act of interpretation, but as Gillian Dyer points out, they "must possess a certain cultural capital or cultural codes to draw on in

order to make sense of [them]" [1987:14]. Neither is it true that one literary text provides a model, of which others are merely copies or derivatives. Texts are not (except in cases of plagiarism) directly linked in this way; they are mediated by the psychic structure and life experiences of the writer. The transcripts I collected provide evidence for this process. It would also be a mistake to think of a unitary literary text which would provide a single model for all writers. Both deconstructive literary theory and reader-response criticism point to a multiplicity of possible meanings.

I also became interested in the way that writers felt that they were somehow putting their "selves" onto the page. Whilst the recording and transforming of life experiences is an obviously personal process, what was meant seemed to be something deeper, suggesting that reading and writing were intimately connected with the construction of subjectivity.

These, therefore, were the personal experiences which led me to questioning the ways in which reading experiences could provide ways of thinking about the self, and influence the ways in which life experiences were expressed in writing.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the preface I outlined some of the personal reasons for my choice of research topic. My concerns, however, do not issue out of solely personal preoccupations. They are also produced by recent shifts in various disciplines which have led to new questions being asked, or old ones being reformulated. In this introduction I will outline some of the developments which have made this possible and some implications for feminist scholarship. In the light of this discussion I will then define the terms of my title, outline the direction my argument will take and end by describing how the rest of the thesis progresses.

Texts, their authors and readers are the objects of concern of the various strands of literary criticism. The relationship between texts and readers was comparatively neglected until the advent of reader-response criticism, which attempted to account for the ways in which these two act upon each other. This was not without its problems, however, since early theories tended to construct the "ideal reader", ignoring the social, economic and psychological factors which influence who reads what and how.

Feminist theories of reading have not been immune from this process, conflating the feminist critic with the "woman reader". In Reading the Romance, Janice Radway [1984] broke this mould by analysing the pleasures associated with reading for a group of middle-class

American women. Ien Ang [1985] analysed the pleasures for women in watching the soap opera Dallas. Helen Taylor [1989] also focussed on how women "reader-viewers" experienced the pleasures and problems of the book and film of Gone With the Wind.

Some feminist literary critics concentrate on writing by women (Elaine Showalter's "gynocritics" [1986:128]), though the authors they consider are generally middle-class and this fact is rarely foregrounded. Showalter's [1977] tradition of women writers is a case in point, and her argument that women form a unified subculture can only hold if differences between women are ignored, or the subculture argument is limited to certain sections of the middle class. There is also a growing body of work on working-class writing, particularly from a historical perspective, though this work has tended to concentrate on male authors, since the majority of working-class novelists have been male [Hawthorn 1984; Klaus 1982 & 1985; Williams 1983a; Worpole 1983].

Julia Swindells, in her study of Victorian working women writers (a term she uses in response to theoretical difficulties in delineating the class position of women) points out that what these women had to do, given an absence of literary models for constructing their autobiographies, was to turn to "the literary", to genres, for their means of expression. This is an important point, since it acknowledges the effects of literary models and

of particular genres on the women's thinking about and representing of themselves. I would argue that this is still the case, though the models and genres available have changed, as have the psychological motives underlying their adoption. Literary genres affect men's writing too. All writers are to some extent working with and transforming literary materials to hand, but gender differences in this process need acknowledging.

Feminist literary critics have recently begun to take women's genres seriously, making good the short-comings in feminist uses of reader-response theory mentioned above. Tania Modleski points out that while universities were beginning to run courses on popular fiction, this generally meant detective stories, spy novels, and so on: men's stories. Her own work focused on romances, gothics and soap operas. She argues that it is "time to begin a feminist reading of women's reading" [1984:34]. This thesis is motivated partly by such a desire, though working on the level of the individual and taking the term "women's reading" to mean all the texts which the individual women found to be important. Modleski points also to the possibilities which might be opened up when work on women's reading and women's writing is brought together.

Writers such as Modleski, Ang, Radway, Taylor and others are using their work on women's genres to create a feminist cultural politics. As Michele Barrett argues, cultural politics "are crucially important to feminism

because they involve struggles over meaning" [1982:37]. The broad aim of such work is to understand the pleasures underlying these genres, so that feminism may become relevant to and thus transform all women's lives. As Ang argues: "what is at stake here is the relationship between fantasy life, pleasure, and socio-political practice and consciousness" [1985:132]. It is part of my project to address these issues by examining the pleasures and contradictions within the genres used by working-class women writers.

Underpinning these approaches to literature are theories of language and literacy, based on divergent views of what language is and what it can do. All assume that language and thought are intimately connected, but the exact nature of this connection is disputed, particularly in the cases of working-class, Black and female people. Deborah Cameron [1985], in attempting to create a feminist theory of language, argues for an approach which acknowledges the social and creative nature of language use, seeing meaning as negotiated through social processes. This suggests that a writer, in creating a text, is engaged in an interaction with language, genre and the wider social system.

To the extent that the writing of the women, whose work forms the case studies presented later, is deeply embedded in personal experience, this study adds to the growing bodies of work on both working-class and women's autobiography. Autobiographical writings themselves can be used

in a variety of ways; as historical evidence of a kind and, from a feminist perspective, as evidence of how gendered subjectivities are both constructed and experienced. In their introduction to Interpreting Women's Lives, the Personal Narratives Group argue that "women's personal narratives can... provide a vital entry point for examining the interaction between the individual and society in the construction of gender" [1989:5].

The textuality of this process is emphasised by Felicity Nussbaum:

It is in these spaces between the cultural construction of the female and the articulation of individual selves and their lived experience, between cultural assignments of gender and the individual translation of them into text, that a discussion of women's autobiographical writing can be helpful.
[1988:149]

It is important to remember that we are not studying this interaction in any abstract way, but the manner in which that interaction is written in concrete texts. What we describe as gendered subjectivity is arrived at through complex and highly individualised (in terms of the number of possible influences on any one person) processes. It would be a monumental, if not impossible, task to account for all the factors operating on any particular individual. It is, however, possible to categorise the types of processes, psychic, social, economic, etc., and begin to construct explanations of them. Cultural factors are

part of this list and this thesis demonstrates how such factors, in particular reading and writing, both enable and constrain the ways in which working-class women may think about themselves. The concept of culture is discussed below.

This study also makes a contribution to various histories. Evidence can be found in it relating to Salford during the twenties and thirties, child sexual abuse in the same time and place, attitudes to schooling, Irish language education, the experience of being a child of the only Black family in a white area in the sixties and seventies, and many other experiences. These are histories which have been marginal to the dominant interpretation of English history. What I am doing here is therefore similar to feminist historians who have taken as their project uncovering that which is "hidden from history", in Sheila Rowbotham's now famous phrase.

There has, however, been a shift in focus in much of women's history, leading to concerns with gender, particularly its manifestations in discourse, and textuality. These new concerns reflect a shift within history towards a greater awareness of language and the "textuality" of written sources. History has been challenged by the post-structuralist assertion that there is no reality outside discourse, that the proper object of study is therefore the language of texts. It is here, Joan Scott [1988] argues, that an awareness of gender is particularly

important, since it has provided an important means for articulating other political differences, for example through the feminising of groups defined as "Other".

Some feminist historians, however, warn against a too ready acceptance of an approach that leads to "historical nihilism" [Smith-Rosenberg 1986:31]. This can be avoided by tying textual analysis to the social:

By applying the critical techniques of close reading to deduce the relations not only of words to words within a literary text but of words in one genre and one social group to the words of quite different genres and social groups - and lastly and most fundamentally, of words to specific social relations within the ebb and flow of a particular culture - we will begin to re-form history and to hear women's stories with fresh clarity. [Smith-Rosenberg 1986:32]

The reading histories I gathered in the interviews I conducted also begin to fill the gap in working-class history identified by Ken Worpole: "The cluster of traditions surrounding people's relationship to books, genres of writing, and the activity of reading itself remains... largely unexamined" [1983:13]. This lack of attention to "people's popular cultural experiences... and the way in which these cultural-aesthetic experiences affected their lives" [1983:30] results in "most comments on reading patterns end[ing] up (as it does in much

educational pedagogy and books about literacy) in a strident or class-bound morality" [1983:19].

Working-class people have a culture and a cultural history frequently denied or misrepresented. The difficulties of defining "culture" have been demonstrated by Raymond Williams. The term can refer to both high and popular culture or, after the anthropological usage, to a whole way of life, and within this to the material or the symbolic level. To define working-class culture, then, as something separate from the dominant culture, is even more difficult. Williams [1961a] begins by discounting what it is not: either the products of "mass" culture or the group of works which could be defined as proletarian art. Williams points out that the "traditional popular culture of England" [1961a:307] was effectively ended by the Industrial Revolution. Studies such as Richard Hoggart's [1957] The Uses of Literacy were concerned with the effects of change on working-class culture and the extent to which it represented the survival of earlier forms [Clarke, Critcher & Johnson 1979].

More recent studies of working-class culture were enabled by the development of the field of cultural studies, which took as its founding texts the works of Williams, Hoggart and E. P. Thompson (1). Richard Johnson [1979] identifies three possible ways of approaching the issue. Orthodox Marxism is concerned with manifestations of class consciousness; the class for-itself. Theorists such as

Williams, Hoggart and Thompson are concerned with the specifics of working-class culture, in terms of its forms, organisations and practices. Althusserian theory, however, unpicks the link between a class and its consciousness. This type of theorisation is concerned with the operation of the dominant ideology in everyday life. In orthodox Marxism culture is relegated to the superstructure and consciousness is formed by economic relations alone. Cultural theorists counter this tendency to functionalism and stress the self-making of the working class.

Working-class writing can therefore be seen as part of an active working-class culture and it becomes important to analyse its particular manifestations. As Williams [1983a] points out, historically, working-class writers, excluded by the traditional concerns of the bourgeois novel (inheritance, propertied marriage, adventure), turned to essays, pamphlets, journalism, popular verse, autobiography and memoirs. This is true for women as for men, with the addition of letters. Ada Nield Chew's introduction to organised politics, for example began with her letters from the "factory girl" to the Crewe Gazette, and the collection Life As We Have Known It [Davies 1977] is composed of letters from women in the Co-operative movement. It is comparatively recently that working-class writers have appropriated the novel, though poetry (particularly the ballad) and the short story have a longer history within radical writing.

As I have indicated, there are many individual disciplines which touch on my area of study; none, I felt, could give the wholeness of approach which I desired, since none focused on the questions as I had chosen to frame them. Secondly, and equally importantly, working-class women and girls were generally absent from academic debate and the construction of knowledge. Women's Studies allows an interdisciplinary approach in which insights from various disciplines can be welded together. It also provides a space in which questions can be asked from the standpoint of women (2):

The interdisciplinary pull in feminist research has been strong because the political baseline of feminist work in any intellectual field - women's subordination and its effects - can never be explained within the terms of the pre-constituted intellectual disciplines alone. [Batsleer et al. 1985:115]

I needed a means of analysis which would allow the women's words to be taken seriously, and to be placed within the context of their life experiences (my original idea of letting the women "speak for themselves" being abandoned as naive, since it implies the free expression of some unmediated essence). I required a way of apprehending the women and their texts both as socially/psychically constructed and as creative agents and works. To this end I conducted four interviews with working-class women writers who attended the Commonword community writing

project in Manchester. Interviewing has a long pedigree within the social sciences and seemed to me to be the best way to approach the problems I was interested in. The interviews and the women's writing could then be read and analysed alongside each other. This process is discussed in detail in the methodology chapter.

At this point it is necessary to define some of the terms contained within my title. When I discuss working-class writing, I am referring to what is commonly termed "creative" writing: stories and poems as opposed to journalistic productions. Williams [1983b], however, notes the way in which the word creative has become so conventional that even advertising copywriters can claim it. As no other, more specialised, term has yet been developed, I will continue to use the word creative in its everyday meaning, since it does have some use in this way.

Part of the problem in attempting to define women's writing, or working-class, or Black or lesbian writing, is that these definitions easily slip into essentialism. This is particularly the case with analyses which stress the "difference" (sexual/ textual) of women's writing. There also tends to be a slippage, possibly out of wishful thinking, between the terms women and feminist, working-class and socialist, Black and a politically motivated Black consciousness. What these definitions also ignore is that people may belong to more than one category.

David Evans [1980] defines working-class writing as a form of opposition, a kind of solidarity, indicating the political nature of the current worker-writer movement, which emerged out of the community politics of the 1970s (3). Similarly, in the Afterword to Writing, Ken Worpole argues that

Working class writing is the literature of the controlled and the exploited. It is shot through with a different kind of consciousness from bourgeois writing. Whatever its subject matter, working class writing, when it is any good at all, must contain in its tissues and exude through its pores, working class experience. Politically, the class struggle would be felt and communicated, even if indirectly, even if the writer has no such designs on the reader. [FWWCP 1979:244-245]

This definition of working-class writing as politically motivated, however, excludes some of the genres through which women have traditionally been able to articulate their experiences. Whilst not denying that many women do write overtly political material, this does not fully account for the range of writing they produce, and therefore analyses of class which ignore gender produce only partial definitions. A Black person may also feel that they are writing most explicitly out of a Black tradition; that for them, Black experience is primary. There is also the problem that Worpole's argument assumes "that working-class experience will, in the end, produce

socialist or proto-socialist forms of understanding" [CCCS Popular Memory Group 1982:224].

One way round the problem of essentialism is to concentrate on practice, on what certain groups of writers actually produce. The problem then is to define who belongs to the group in question. Women's class position has conventionally been defined by that of the male "heads" of the households they inhabit. Women are therefore marginal to this form of analysis: "it is a theoretical statement that women's experiences, loyalties, and social action are not their own in the sense that men's are" [Abbott & Sapsford 1987:2].

Since the late 1960s feminists have been consistently pushing for a more adequate conceptualisation, which takes account of both class and gender. The conventional account still has its defenders, however, including John Goldthorpe [1983]. His claims have been rebutted in detail by Michelle Stanworth who argues that his account "ignores the way gender is implicated in the production and reproduction of the class system, and the extent to which the subordinate class position of women, married or otherwise, are shaped by the dynamics of class itself" [1984:167].

It is not possible to undertake a complete review of all the relevant literature here (4), but proposed solutions have included viewing women (or wives) as a class in their

own right, ordering households according to the highest class position of any of its members, or developing scales which include factors such as education, previous occupations, and whether work outside the home is full- or part-time. Michele Barrett argues for Jean Gardiner's formulation of women's dual relationship to class: "An aspect of women's relationship to the class structure is that it is mediated, to some extent at least, by the configuration of the family, dependence on men, and domestic labour" [1988:135].

Despite these theoretical difficulties, however, and despite the problems which arise from trying to bring together analyses of class as a structure and cultural theories of class, it "is still a central factor in the lives of urban women... because class considerations determine where they live... how long they live and how far they have any control over their lives" [Delamont 1980:132].

Debates also occur around the issue of who can and cannot be counted as Black. I am following Amina Mama's use of the term, since, as she argues "In Britain it is clear that Black refers to Africans (continental and of the diaspora) and Asians (primarily of the Indian subcontinent descent). All have a shared history of oppression by British colonialism and racism" [1984:23].

The case for working-class writers to tell their own

stories slides into the debate concerning the status of such work. The ambiguous status of writing by working-class women, and its strength, was acknowledged by Virginia Woolf, in her introduction to Life As We Have Known It: "Whether that is literature, or whether that is not literature, I will not presume to say, but that it explains much and tells much, that is certain" [in Davies 1977:xxxxi].

Amongst those who did "presume to say", however, was Charles Osbourne, the Literary Director of the Arts Council of Great Britain. In a response by the Literature Panel of the Arts Council to an application for grant aid from the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers in 1979, he pronounced that the writing submitted in support of the application was "successful in a social and therapeutic sense" [quoted in Phil Boyd 1983:1] but that "the members were of one voice in judging the examples of literature submitted; they considered the whole corpus of little if any solid literary merit" [quoted in Morley et al. 1982:vi].

Despite the attempt at condemnation, the confusion of categories is evident even in this statement. It was "literature" which was submitted, though without "literary" merit. What this points to is the need to unpack the class-bound assumptions behind the definitions. The differential use of critical concepts such as therapy demonstrates the political uses to which they may be put.

As Marion Glastonbury argues, working-class women fail to speak, not because they are personally disqualified, nor because the substance of their days is inherently intractable in its refusal to lend itself to literature, but because a direct view from the social position they occupy cannot be comfortably accommodated within the perspectives of the educated public. [1979:172]

I need also to explain my meaning of the word "narrative", which I use in a broad sense to mean the telling of stories; more particularly the stories the women I interviewed write, or would like to write, or tell of their lives and their writing. Narrative in this sense is seen by some writers as a fundamental human property:

For we dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn hate and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future.

[Barbara Hardy quoted in Rosen n. d.]

Narrative also has a use as a "form of understanding and explanation" [Brooks 1984:10] and I am interested in the ways in which these writers use stories to construct a sense of self and of the world they live in. Poetry is also used to do this, but as in the saying "every picture tells a story", there is a sense in which there is a story in each poem; told, half-told, or with the dominant

emotion distilled into a poetic form.

There is an important sense in which the stories I present are re-writings; they have taken over and transformed other narratives. There is a dialectic between life and story:

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semi-conscious, but virtually uninterrupted monologue. [Brooks 1984:3]

Stories are, therefore, both ways through which we are constructed, and through which we creatively transform the world.

The central argument of this thesis is that people use stories as ways of thinking through their lives and the world they live in, of building upon and making sense of the past. Stories offer a means of self-creation, of considering choices and determining actions. The meanings thus created are sometimes oppositional and always dialectical and developmental. The same stories or genres may offer different satisfactions or combinations of pleasures and uses to different people. Romance, for example, may be a way of claiming time or achieving vicarious satisfaction [Radway 1984] or of expressing anger [Modleski 1984].

I demonstrate how these processes operate through an examination of the reading and writing histories of a group of working-class women. An examination of the women's writing, in conjunction with their own comments on it, reveals evidence of how texts are read as well as written, and of the links between the two processes. From the information given in the interviews I trace the influences of particular genres, books and poems on the writings of the women and the ways in which they use these to construct a sense of self. That writers chose to re-write existing genres is an indication therefore both of their power and of the possibilities of transformation and change.

The importance of writing in this process is illustrated by the intensity of emotion which it generates, in terms of pain, anger and exhilaration. The ideas of expression and authenticity have great significance for these women; the giving of shape to life experiences which are frequently dismissed by mainstream culture is an act both personal and political. It is an assertion that these experiences do matter, and have a meaning wider than the individual.

In analysing the transcripts and manuscripts I collected, I have applied a form of reader based criticism in such a way that it becomes sensitive to the position of actual readers, people situated in personal, cultural and socio-economic history. The worth of reader-response criticism

lies in its potential sensitivity to the uses individual readers can make of a text, but concern with the general principles of response and with "ideal readers" has meant that so far these opportunities have not been taken up. I have also applied theories derived from feminist literary criticism, which illuminate certain aspects of the writing.

The case study chapters demonstrate the ways in which particular sets of educational and life experiences organise the way in which a writer comes into being. The traditional view of the writer is concerned with "Talent", a mystical, Muse-granted inspiration which will miraculously appear regardless of circumstance. What is illustrated by the case-studies is an alternative view of writing as determined by social and personal factors. The writer does not emerge, fully-fledged, but is the result of a developmental process, of a personal history of reading and writing experiences.

In the chapters that follow, I first set out the methodological and epistemological principles behind my research, then discuss a variety of theoretical perspectives from different disciplines which have insights to offer into my concerns. After this a series of four case-study chapters allows me to demonstrate the links between reading, writing and subjectivity by discussing in detail some of the issues presented as important to themselves by the women I met. Finally my conclusions are presented, and

some commonalities between the case-studies examined.

Notes

1) An account of the development of cultural studies is given by Stuart Hall [1980].

2) The issue of feminist standpoint theory will be addressed in detail in the methodology chapter.

3) Histories of the worker-writer movement can be found in Evans [1980] and FWWCP [1978].

4) These issues are debated in Crompton & Mann [1986] and a comprehensive review is contained in Abbott and Sapsford [1987].

Chapter 2: Methodology

My prime methodological concern was that my research should conform to the principles of what is loosely described as "feminist research". The issue of finding an appropriate methodology and set of methods is complicated by Women's Studies being an interdisciplinary field, and thus the way in which it is impossible to categorise the research I undertook as feminist sociology, feminist literary criticism, or as feminist psychology. No single area, therefore, could provide a blueprint for me to follow.

It has been pointed out that many discussions of feminist research proceed without examining the question, "what is feminism?" [Delmar 1972] This has never been an easy question to answer and responses have changed according to both historical circumstance and the development of the women's movement. Rosalind Delmar for example, argued in 1972 that "Feminism is the political movement of women produced by the contradiction between men and women. It is women's response to their oppression" [1986:8]. This definition says nothing of the direction and priorities of that political movement, nor of the differences between women. This latter issue was placed on the feminist agenda by working-class women, Black women, lesbians, bisexual women, older women and disabled women.

By 1986 it was no longer possible to sum up feminism as if

there was a unitary category of "women", and Delmar ammended her definition:

Many would agree that at the very least a feminist is someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs would require a radical change (some would say a revolution even) in the social, economic and political order. [1986:8]

Here the earlier definition is expanded and differences in priorities implicitly acknowledged. The emphasis is on constructing a definition which can encompass a variety of approaches.

Delmar then proceeds to outline the problems in pinning down "feminism" in practice. Is it another term for the women's movement? An intellectual current? A section of other movements? All of these? The answer to this last question has to be "yes", but it is the idea of an intellectual tendency that I need to pursue. In "How to do what we want to do", Renate Duelli-Klein characterises feminism as leading to a particular academic perspective "in which women's experiences, ideas and needs (different and differing as they may be) are valid in their own right, and androcentricity - man-as-the-norm - stops being the only recognised frame of reference for human beings" [1983:89].

These definitions are useful because they recognise the diversity of women's experiences and oppressions and do not try to impose a false unity. "'Sisterhood' can ... be misleading unless contextualised" argue Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davies [1985:62]. Delmar and Duelli-Klein's definitions are broad enough to allow such contextualisations to take place.

In Duelli-Klein's definition the link is made between feminism and academic practice, leading into questions of methodology; in particular whether there is, or could be, "a" feminist methodology. Some women have attempted to produce "guidelines" for feminist research, or recommendations of particular methods which, it is hoped, will lead to the greater empowerment of women [Mies 1983; Cameron 1989; Cook & Fonow 1986]. Many of these attempts at guidelines for and characterisations of feminist methodology acknowledge that it "is in the process of becoming and it is not yet a fully articulated stance" [Mies 1983:3].

These guidelines also tend to have been developed within the field of sociology or more generally the social sciences and therefore have a concern with practical projects or policy developments which cannot easily be transferred to this research project. Shulamit Reinharz, for example, ends her description of "experiential analysis" with a discussion of "policy questions" [1983:174]. Other researchers are concerned with ways to

work with women's groups, such as Maria Mies' [1983] use of the principles of active involvement and conscientization (or consciousness raising), based on the problem-formulating methods developed in the 1960s by Paulo Freire in his literacy work with the Brazilian peasantry.

The main point of agreement within these various accounts is that feminist research should be research "for women". Duelli-Klein defines this as "research that tries to take women's needs, interests and experiences into account and aims at being instrumental in improving women's lives in one way or another" [1983:90]. The first half of this definition has much broader application than the second, unless a very loose concept of use value is held. This area has been problematised by Shulamit Reinharz [1983] and by Sue Wise [1987] who points out that feminist research can be seen as part of a tradition of "advocacy research" within the social sciences, but that the idea of research being beneficial to women assumes that the interests of all women are identical. The influence of research on social policy is also difficult to trace. The relationship between research and policy is therefore always problematic.

Other broad methodological principles which have been proposed in many feminist discussions include an "emphasis on the empowerment of women" [Cook & Fonow 1986:5], the replacement of the myth of value-free research with "conscious partiality" [Mies 1983:122], and a democratic

[Cameron 1989] and non-hierarchical [Oakley 1981] approach, in which the researcher uses her own experience and makes herself vulnerable [Stanley & Wise 1983].

So, with these issues in mind, how did I "do what I wanted to do?" [Duelli-Klein 1983] In order to begin to untangle the complex relationship between reading, writing and subjectivity, I needed research methods which would allow the subjects of the research to tell their own story in their own way, giving me access to the narratives they used to do this. This would also allow me to prioritise the issues as presented by the women themselves: in other words, to take their words seriously.

I decided that rather than undertake a large-scale survey, attempting to be "representative" of working-class women writers, I would conduct lengthier interviews with a smaller sample which would allow greater depth of questioning. In the context of educational research, Lawrence Stenhouse [1982] points out that while surveys can indicate broad trends, attention also needs to be paid to individuals, and that knowledge can be generated from case studies. As Stenhouse also notes, there is no single way of producing a case study. What he describes as the "classical case study tradition" derives from the Chicago School of Sociology and includes evidence collected from participant observation.

Stenhouse also notes the use of the case histories by

practitioners in various fields, medical, psychoanalytic, educational. The psychoanalytic case history was developed by Freud as a means of recounting his analyses of individual patients through their "talking cure" (as named by a woman patient of Freud's friend Breuer). In doing so, argues Stephen Marcus [1984], he created a new literary form. The patient's narrative is presented, framed by that of the analyst. Treating the case history, as Marcus does, as modernist literature emphasises the fictionality of the accounts, both of the self and of the analysis.

My case studies draw on both these models. Like Freud I am concerned with narrative and I frame the interviewees' stories of themselves by my analysis of these stories. I do not, however, use classic psychoanalytic theory in my interpretations but feminist reinterpretations which enable me to view the women also in their sociological, historical, educational contexts. I treat the interviewees not as texts in themselves, but as creators of texts.

Carolyn Steedman has claimed the case study as a way of depicting working-class childhood, arguing that otherwise psychological complexity is only attributed to middle-class and upper-class minds. In a similar manner, the use of case studies allows me to analyse the complex ways in which the working-class women I interviewed constructed their writings and their senses of self. Since my particular interest is in narrative, the case study has other advantages, also outlined by Steedman:

The written case-study allows the writer to enter the present into the past, allows the dream, the wish or the fantasy of the past to shape current time, and treats them as evidence in their own right. In this way, the narrative form of case-study shows what went into its writing, shows the bits and pieces from which it is made up, in the way that history refuses to do, and that fiction can't. Case-study presents the ebb and flow of memory, the structure of dreams, the stories that people tell to explain themselves to others. [1986:20-21]

Since these stories are precisely the focus of my thesis, the case study provides the most useful way of dealing with the information I gathered through the interviews. What I required was a means of gaining enough background information to help place the women and then give them as much space as possible in which to tell their own stories. This personal narrative, the "story of the stories", can then be used to illuminate the subject's writing. To this end, I chose to do relatively unstructured interviews, with no limit to the time each one took.

This type of interviewing is undertaken by researchers from a variety of disciplines. Within history it is used by the practitioners of oral history. Oral historians and folklorists largely developed their techniques to capture the voice of a past and of a disappearing oral culture in which men were historical agents and their work the most

important topic for analysis [Evans 1970]. The techniques of oral history have allowed researchers to reach people who do not usually leave written documentation of their lives. It can therefore create a history from below, and this led to its popularity within "alternative" histories of the working-class, women, Black people, lesbians and gays. This use is not inherent in its practice, however: "Oral history is not necessarily an instrument for change; it depends upon the spirit in which it is used. Nevertheless, oral history certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history" [Thompson 1978:2].

Oral history has had to fight for its right to evidential status, and in so doing has undermined simplistic notions of the facticity of written evidence. It is not a new technique, either within history or folklore studies, but rather one which had fallen from favour for its supposed lack of objectivity. As Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham [1977] point out, however, "history" is not already there in the tapes and transcripts made, but is produced out of these materials. Different sources enable different reinterpretations of the past.

One of the problems which oral history has had to face from its beginnings is that of memory. It was suggested that since people mis-remember things, oral evidence was unreliable. Thompson's [1978] defence was that while "facts" could be checked with other sources, this mis-

remembering was in part a social process and so could give access to the symbolic, rather than the factual, level of narrative. It is recognised that when it involves meaningful material, rather than random stimuli, memory is a reconstructive process. This was established in 1932 by Bartlett's procedure which asked non-native Americans to repeat an unfamiliar native American folktale. He found that their attempts to retell the story could be described as "efforts after meaning" [quoted in Gross 1987:176]. During the interviews I conducted, the interviewees demonstrated an awareness of the interpretive nature of what they were doing. Marsha, for instance, referring to her parents not reading to her when she was a child, declared that "because I don't remember it, I think they probably didn't" [A4:145:13-14].

Within oral history, the understanding of memory processes has become increasingly sophisticated. The work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Popular Memory Group highlights the way individual memories "draw on a general cultural repertoire" [1982:229] and are therefore a social understanding of the past-present relationship which, the group argue, is the "proper object of history" [1982:240]. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson [1990] have recently argued that the naive approach to oral history has been disrupted by, amongst others, Luisa Passerini, who asserted the value of the subjective in oral accounts, which could be used to construct a "history of working-class subjectivity" [1979:103]. Learning from psycho-

analysis and literary criticism, oral history is now more concerned with the "mythical" [Samuel & Thompson 1990] elements of people's stories and the symbols and devices they use to tell them.

In their introduction to Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History, Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai consider the relationship between the general principles of feminist research and the specifics of oral history practices. Taking feminist research to be that "by, for and about" women, they argue that feminist oral history both conforms to and transforms these principles. Feminist oral history has been "about" women, having the advantage of making visible marginalised experiences, but also contributing to a particular image of "woman" within feminism, although this image is now becoming more complex and multi-faceted. The involvement of the narrator "adds a new dimension to the concept of 'by' women" [1991:2]. Finally: "By documenting women's representations of their own reality, we were engaging in advocacy. We felt that our work was, indeed, political and that it was for women" [1991:2].

Hilary Graham argues that, within the social sciences, recording women's stories has many advantages over other methods of data collection. Stories are records of "the culture as it is lived and spoken", while "recall is facilitated when the informant determines the shape and content of the story" [1984:110]. Storytelling both

"counteracts the tendency of surveys to fracture women's experiences" [1984:119], and gives greater control of the research process to the interviewee, while acknowledging the "validity of self-knowledge" [1984:107]. The advantages of which Graham writes are important and useful, but I need to add an analysis of the ways in which storytelling is constrained and constructed, rather than a free choice of appropriate language with which to express an underlying truth.

Before the interviews took place, it was necessary to decide how to find my sample. I decided against contacting past students, since I felt that their responses would be affected by their knowledge of me as a "teacher", compounding the problem of power differentials between researcher and researched. Similarly, women with whom I had worked in Liverpool would have particular perceptions of my role and attitudes. I, in turn, would have preconceptions of them which would affect the way I conducted the research. I knew that the Commonword community writing project in Manchester ran groups for women writers and so I contacted them.

From this initial contact I was invited by Liz Rutherford, then a full-time worker at Commonword, to a session of the Thursday morning women writers' group. I went along, and during the introductions at the beginning of the session explained who I was, where my interest in working-class women's writing had come from, why I was doing the

research and what it was about. I hoped this would give the women present sufficient information on which to base their decision to take part or not. I then asked anyone who would be interested in being interviewed, or who wanted to know more about the process to speak to me at the end of the session. The majority of my sample, therefore, was self-selecting; the label working-class was claimed by the women themselves. I ended the morning with a list of names, three of whom became interviewees.

As is often the case with writers' groups, all but one of the participants were white. This was not altogether a result of institutionalised racism, since there were Black writers' groups, both mixed and women only, which Black people could make a positive choice to join. While realising that it was not possible in such a small sample to "represent" the diversity of working-class women's lives, I did not want to contribute to the exclusion of Black women from the production of knowledge and perpetuate the myth that "working-class" means white. As the editors of The Common Thread point out, working-class women

come in all shapes and sizes, nationalities and ages. We're Black and white, Jewish and Gentile, Lesbian and heterosexual, and we live with a range of disabilities, physical and otherwise. Our experiences and our politics are varied and wide-ranging, and we speak with many voices... [Burnett et al. 1989:2]

I felt that it was impossible to express this while interviewing a sample comprised solely of white women. I therefore returned to Commonword and asked to be put in touch with some Black women writers. I contacted two women by phone at their place of work, explained that I had been given their number by Commonword and that I would like to meet them to explain what my research was about and discuss the possibility of interviewing them. Both agreed to a meeting and one agreed to become my fourth interviewee. The other woman was enthusiastic about the project, but moved out of the area before we could find a mutually convenient time for the interview to take place and I decided that because of the amount of data generated by each interview, four would be a sufficient number to work with. Within the small sample was also a range of ages, sexualities and degrees of politicisation, more through good luck than good management, but highly satisfying, nevertheless.

Having found my initial group of interviewees, I was then faced with the need to construct the type of interview schedule I required. I wanted to create a relatively "unstructured" interview, but as Robert Burgess points out, the "unstructured interview may ... appear to be without a structure, but nevertheless the researcher has to establish a framework within which the interview can be conducted; the unstructured interview is flexible, but it is also controlled" [1982:107]. The structured element in my interview situations came from an initial list of

standardised questions regarding name, age, occupations, etc. and a checklist of topics which I wanted to cover. Using a checklist rather than a series of questions allowed me to pursue any line of thinking which the woman herself found to be relevant, or in which I had a particular interest at the time of the interview.

I found that all the interviewees responded positively to this system, both in talking at length about their ideas and experiences and in saying later (often in surprise) that they had enjoyed the interview, and had not found it as threatening as they expected. This kind of response leads into questions of why women are such "good" research subjects. These issues are addressed by (amongst others) Oakley [1981], Finch [1984] and Wise [1987].

Ann Oakley problematises the interviewer-interviewee relationship within the context of her own research into women's experiences of childbirth. She criticises the "masculine" bias of the "text-book" method of interviewing, with its stress on objectivity, detachment, etc. She finds that when women interview women, this model is both impossible to maintain and ethically undesirable. Her interviewees were frequently interested in and enthusiastic about her work and wanted to take an active part in the process, engaging with both the research and the researcher in ways they found meaningful for themselves. She recommends a non-hierarchical approach, assuming that this will reduce the ethical dilemmas

involved and produce "better" data.

In "It's great to have someone to talk to", Janet Finch examines similar questions, with reference to the ways in which they arose during her varied research experiences. She notes that many researchers have been surprised at how easy it is to obtain data from women, despite any initial misgivings they may have, and explains this phenomenon by reference to three factors. Firstly, women are more used to being questioned than men; secondly that an interview taking place in the woman's home is likely to take on the character of a conversation; and finally that "the structural position of women, and in particular their consignment to the privatised, domestic sphere (Stacey 1981), makes it particularly likely that they will welcome the opportunity to talk to a sympathetic listener" [1984:74].

While not denying the explanatory value of these factors in many cases, I would argue that the last point is more relevant to women outside paid employment. The women in my study are either in employment or have been so for the majority of their adult lives, thus spending time in both public and private spheres. The only woman currently involved in bringing up a child also works full-time in paid employment. The women are, however, relatively new to writing, or at least to having an audience: being taken seriously as writers, outside the safe boundaries of their writers' workshops, may be a novel experience, as is the

chance to talk at length about their writing.

Finch also notes the "identification" that takes place when interviewee and interviewer are both female, grounded in their shared "subordinate structural position" [1984:76] in society, and that this is likely to produce "good" data. For Finch then, as a feminist, this issue is necessarily linked to questions of ethics: "There is a real exploitative potential in the easily established trust between women, which makes women especially vulnerable as subjects of research" [1984:81].

Sue Wise makes ethical issues the central focus of her review of feminist research. She points to the limited use of "purist" discussions of ethics, arguing that "situational" or "emergent" ethics are more helpful, rooted in the real dilemmas of actual research. While agreeing with Oakley's critique of non-feminist theory and practice of interviewing, she finds her alternative model unsatisfactory. She argues that Oakley

dismisses the power imbalance between women researcher and researched by saying that we are "all women together" and thus share the same structural relationship to "society" and, being similarly oppressed somehow acts as a magical device for the instant dissolution of inequalities. [1987:66]

The "structural relationship" of the researched and researcher is fundamentally unequal, and her solution an evasion of power and responsibility. (1)

Although Finch shares Oakley's concept of the "shared structural position of women", Wise finds her analysis of her research experiences to be an advance on the former, since she is concerned with the issue of vulnerability, both individually and collectively, acknowledging women's greater vulnerability to exploitation by other women. Finch argues that the woman researcher needs to make herself vulnerable through self-disclosure to balance the power equation. Wise believes that "this conscious use of self-disclosure and vulnerability ... is more related to being a feminist, than simply to being a woman" [1984:69].

Slippage between the terms "woman" and "feminist" creates confusion, as does the use of the term "woman" to hide differences. Wise points out that the concentration of feminist research on women's oppression means that its subjects tend to belong to groups seen as the most oppressed; working-class and minority ethnicity women, mentally ill and "battered" women etc., while its researchers tend to belong to more powerful groups, typically middle-class, white, "well educated" etc.: "The shared language of womanhood may be very deceptive if we imagine that simply being a woman transcends these other relationships of power and subordination" [1987:74]. Any notions of equality constitute a "romantic myth" [1987:74] which can be created only by ignoring the framework of the research relationship itself.

This last point is crucial since not only are there struc-

tural differences between women, but the researcher also has power which derives from this role. Wise identifies three sources of this power. Firstly the researcher chooses the topic and conceptual framework of the research; secondly she decides which questions are to be asked: and finally she possesses "cognitive authority" [1987:76] in that she becomes seen as the "expert" on her subjects' lives, while they themselves are not.

When subjects have the opportunity to engage with what has been written about them, "cognitive authority" and competing interpretations may become points of conflict. Katherine Borland discusses her experience of interviewing her grandmother as part of a project on the lives of older Black women. One story her grandmother told was interpreted by her through a feminist framework, which her grandmother felt distorted her experience. The dilemma here is that

On the one hand, we seek to empower the women we work with by revaluing their perspectives, their lives, and their art in a world that has systematically ignored or trivialized women's culture. On the other, we hold an explicitly political vision of the structural conditions that lead to particular social behaviours, a vision that our field collaborators, many of whom do not consider themselves feminists, may not recognise as valid. [1991:64]

Borland notes that one reason why interpretive differences may not become apparent until this stage is that the "field work exchange fosters a tendency to downplay differences, as both investigator and source seek to establish a footing with one another and find a common ground from which to proceed to the work of collecting and recording oral materials" [1991:72]. I would add that a concern to understand the woman's own meanings leads to the interviewer being unlikely to directly challenge the interviewee's perceptions, as does concern regarding people's tendencies to attempt to be a "good" interviewee by saying what they think the interviewer wants to hear.

Borland's solution to this dilemma is to involve interviewees in the process of interpretation, but since a PhD thesis is necessarily an individual rather than a collaborative project, this strategy was not available to me. Where it has been possible to obtain a second interview I have discussed my work with the interviewee if she wished me to do so. This was not, however, always the case, possibly because I was seen to be the "expert" and the woman in question felt herself to be an unequal participant in the conversation.

The specificity of being a white woman interviewing a Black woman has been addressed by Rosalind Edwards. Reviewing the literature on women interviewing women, she points out that it is generally assumed that both parties are white. Models based on shared structural position and

mutual trust did not apply to the situation she found herself in. The trust of the Black women she interviewed was earned on the basis of her acknowledgement of differences, rather than on assumed commonalities:

I believe if I had not established my acknowledgement of difference between us on the basis of race and its ramifications in terms of my ability to understand what was said to me I would have been perceived as pompous. [1990:487]

This is the category to which the women consigned most of the white authority figures they had dealings with. After this acknowledgement, the shared situation of being mothers and mature students could be used to develop understanding. My work with Marsha followed a similar pattern of difference and commonality based on us both being writers within the broad field of community writing.

There are also ethical issues concerned with being a taker of stories; after a story has been taped and transcribed to whom does it belong? This issue has been raised by Marjorie Shostak [1990], who made a book out of the words of a !Kung bushwoman she interviewed during the course of an anthropological project in Botswana. In this case Shostak had to work to ensure that Nisa's consent to the use of her words was truly informed consent, given that the society in which she lived had an oral rather than a literate culture. In my own situation, informed consent was more easily obtained, since all the women involved had an idea of college work if not of the requirements of a

PhD. The inequality remains, however, in that once I have taken the stories and made something of them, I will be seen in some way as their owner, rather than the women who told them in the first place.

In order to make my research as egalitarian as possible, I began by explaining to the women writers' group who I was and what the research was all about; that is, I told my own story. My self-disclosure thus came first, so that they could make as informed a choice as possible. In the interview situation, I tried to create a relaxed and non-hierarchical atmosphere in the ways Oakley suggests, meeting women in their own homes or, if they preferred, in a meeting room at Commonword. I chatted generally, made or accepted tea or coffee, and involved them in the setting up of the recording equipment.

Before the interview began, I promised both confidentiality and anonymity. I also made it clear that I did not have a pre-set list of questions, only topics I wanted to cover, and that if at any time a woman felt uncomfortable with a question, or felt it was too intrusive, she did not have to feel obliged to answer. This approach was obviously successful to some degree, since Marilyn felt able to say, "I won't sort of go into the reasons why I read that book [The Courage to Grieve], except to say that that was how I was feeling" [A2:62:8-10]. And later, "I'm not one for going to the pictures. But I mean there's a reason for that which I won't go into, it's a personal

thing [A2:65:13-15]. I sent each woman a copy of the tape and/or transcript of the interview, so that the "product" of the session could belong equally to us both and in order to give her the opportunity to reflect on her words and comment further if she so desired.

The research topic is entirely my own (though many of my ideas and questions have been developed in discussion with other women writers), and I felt that all I could honestly do was present its genesis and leave the women to make up their own minds. One woman in the Commonword group decided that she would not take part, despite her interest in the topic, since she did not agree that Women's Studies should be an academic pursuit, bound by the regulations of the University. The question areas I was interested in were set in advance, but I tried to make each interview as responsive as possible to the individual woman's concerns, though the way in which I pursued these areas was necessarily influenced by my interpretation of her words.

In the final analysis, however, it is my interpretation which will carry the "cognitive authority" and all I can do is to make this issue explicit and reproduce the women's words in full, so that their own ideas are visible too. Their consignment to the appendices, though, seems to underline their secondary status. One woman asked to read what I had written about her, which made me realise that all the interviewees should have this opportunity. The format and language of a doctoral thesis are not partic-

ularly accessible or interesting, to say the least, and Deborah Cameron's stricture to "Feed back what you learn from [your research] in a form those involved can understand and make use of" [1989:10] is an ongoing problem for me. I have, however, discussed the ideas behind my work with the women concerned whenever possible.

The problems of attempting to combine the needs of feminist research with the imperatives of producing an academic paper have been discussed by Vivienne Griffiths. It is not possible to produce research within this framework which is simultaneously "for women" and for the researcher:

The fact that I was conducting a piece of research which would have to be written up as a Ph.D. meant that I was necessarily "studying" the girls. Because I now have to produce a thesis, I am having to analyse and interpret the girls' experience at a distance. In these ways, doing feminist research clashed with the demands for doing a Ph.D.." [1987:7-8]

My own subjects are more available to me on an ongoing basis than were the school girls in Griffiths' study, but the need to produce an "original" thesis which is the work of the author alone (a rather sanitised view of the way in which ideas develop) acts as a constraint on any notions of working more collaboratively "with" the women, rather than "on" them.

At the end of each interview I asked the interviewee to allow me to take a copy of any of her writing that she thought was relevant to the areas we had been talking about, or that was particularly representative of her work as a whole. Analysis of the tapes will provide a new way of reading the written works, and analysis of the latter will throw into sharper relief the concerns brought out in the interview.

After each interview was completed, it was necessary to transform it from an audio tape to a written and finally typed transcript. This is not as transparent a process as it would appear. Elinor Ochs [1979] points out that all transcription is selective, reflecting the theoretical goals of the research. By reproducing the tapes in their entirety, I am giving status to the women's words and laying open the basis on which my selections and interpretations of these words were made. The only things to be edited out were ums and erms, stutters, hesitations, repetitions and half words, and sometimes my own comments, when they did not direct the course of the interview. Although this imposes a false coherence on speech, it increases readability.

I then had to decide if or how accent and dialect, my own included, should be transcribed. Lennon, McAdam & O'Brien address these issues as part of "the relationship between language, power and status" [1988:13]. I share the difficulties they faced in producing written texts from

the interviews they conducted with Irish women about their lives:

The dilemma we faced was that, on the one hand, we wanted to convey the idiom of people's speech but we became increasingly aware that it is only working-class accents which are portrayed with phonetic spelling or distinct turns of phrases. Quite often, they are being either caricatured or trivialised in the process. Middle- and upper-class accents and speech are rarely written phonetically or presented as having their own set of eccentricities. Instead, they are presented as sounding exactly the same as Standard English which is obviously untrue.

[1988:14]

The writers settled for an attempt to "convey a sense of the speaker's style, rather than a more direct representation of her speech and idiom" [1988:14]. In similar fashion, I have used a modified orthography [Ochs 1979], including abbreviations like "cos" whenever they are used, but not attempting a phonetic version of each accent.

The final issue here is that of page layout. Those systems which give the greatest apparent coherence to the speaker's story simultaneously disguise the role of the researcher. Rowbotham and McCrindle [1977] for example, edit out the questions they asked and any interventions they made, presenting uninterrupted versions of their

interviewees' stories. I feel that to have done so in this case would, however, have given a greater apparent freedom to the interviewees than they actually possessed, and fail to demonstrate the ways in which their stories were shaped by my questions and responses, thus running counter to the principle of feminist research which argues that the researcher should make herself visible.

I have included the whole transcripts as appendices because I felt it was important to give the women's words this (semi) independent status. Since I have quoted so heavily from them, I also thought it would be useful for the reader to have access to the whole for the purpose of comparison, and in order to assess my reading of them. I have occasionally used the same quotation more than once when I felt it was necessary to the development of more than one argument. Each woman's writing is included at the end of her case-study chapter, again so that the reader can easily assess the use made of them.

Having completed the interviews, I then had to decide what analytical tools were likely to be useful in the task of interpreting them and the accompanying writing. Techniques for gathering oral evidence are employed by sociologists, psychologists and historians, and the data so generated lies on the boundaries of these particular disciplines. In that many of my questions focussed on "literature" of various types, and the women's perceptions of it, I was using a technique similar to that developed by some

practitioners of reader-response criticism, for example Norman Holland [1975] in Five Readers Reading.

The attitudes of these disciplines to the data they have collected varies widely. Broadly speaking, sociologists and historians are more likely to take people's words at face value, aggregating them into trends, and addressing only such problems as memory, deliberate deceit etc., arguing that these are also present in the use of written documentation. Psychologists and literary critics, particularly those drawing on psychoanalytic theory, are more likely to pay attention to the forms, genres and languages in which the stories are couched. I needed to draw from all of these areas in order to suggest ways in which the women's words may be read.

The mode of presentation of the case studies also presents difficulties. What I am attempting to do, in one sense, is write feminist biographies of these women's lives, structured around their experiences of reading and writing. As Liz Stanley points out, however, "the general run of 'feminist biography' fails to problematise what is or might be 'feminist' about it" [1990b:59]. Stanley outlines the facets which distinguish feminist biography: the need to see biography as "composed by textually-located ideological practice" [1990b:62]; a foregrounding of the process of the production of the biographical text; and a focus on networks rather than individuals.

I believe that my work achieves the status of feminist biography since firstly it analyses its own textual practices and those of the writers described (in the theoretical and individual chapters); secondly through this chapter it analyses the labour process of its composition; and thirdly, although a case study is a kind of spot light, it situates the women's lives in socio-historical terms, recognising the importance of the workshops in the production of their writing and paying attention to the networks and communities to which they describe themselves as belonging.

Describing the process of constructing a biography necessarily includes the presentation of autobiographical evidence. This is viewed as an important principle in feminist research [Stanley 1990b]. The way in which this is done, however, is questioned by Toril Moi: "we... have a responsibility to make our position reasonably apparent to our readers. Whether this is necessarily always best done through autobiographical statements about the critic's emotional and personal life is a more debatable point" [1985:44]. Moi is referring here to feminist literary criticism. I would argue that in the case of this research it is important to introduce autobiographical details because of the way in which they bear upon the choice of topic and the particular understandings I brought to the research, such as the idea that anyone can be a writer, which I share with the women I interviewed. I have tried to include autobiographical information which

will enable the reader to understand processes relevant to my interpretation of the writers' biographies and to explain the origins of my stories of their stories.

A further issue surrounding the use of autobiographical data is that of retrospective research, when a researcher uses information given her in the past, in situations in which she is not known to be researching. In her discussion of her research on women quantity surveyors, Clara Greed argues that retrospective ethnography provides her with a way of bringing her past experiences into the research, giving them the same analytical treatment as events during the actual research process. The only problem which she sees is that of "over-familiarity" [1990:147] which she overcomes by attempting to "make the familiar strange (Delamont 1985)" [1990:148].

In a similar way, my research has been informed by my past experiences, particularly my own reading history and my experiences within writers' workshops. These experiences are partly individual and partly belong to groups in which I was a member. Sue Wise recognises the dilemma implicit in this situation:

The information I had used had not been gathered as part of a formally-designated research project, but as a retrospective look at part of my own work with these people. I had not asked their permission to use it for research... so was this covert participant observation and, if so, could it be

justified? [1987:53]

Wise's answer is that, no, this was not covert research, since none of the information obtained had been acquired by trickery, and so providing she created a sufficient degree of anonymity for the people she described, her work was justified. This, to me, seems to be the only answer to the problem of the researcher never being truly "off duty" [1987:56].

In the discussion above I have outlined the ways in which I applied feminist principles in my research. After the stage of gathering the data, I was involved in the process of knowledge creation. This necessarily involves taking a particular epistemological stance. Sandra Harding characterises an epistemology as a justificatory strategy underlying the theory and methods used in any particular piece of research. In 1987 she outlined what she believed to be the three epistemological positions from which feminists could argue. Since then her work has provoked an ongoing debate with those critical of her work. I am using here a synthesis of the arguments developed from 1987 onwards.

Empiricism attempts to discover facts through scientific observation and experiment. The knower, in this scenario, is the modern subject of Western philosophy, emerging with the Enlightenment and adopted by liberal humanism. This subject, while supposedly above politics and gender-neutral, has generally been conceived of as generic Man,

woman being Other, consigned to nature and the irrational. Feminist empiricists argue that "biased" science (including the social sciences and the humanities) is "bad" science. They criticise the masculinist bias under the supposed objectivity of much research and contend that politicisation removes the blinkers which cause biases. They claim for women rationality and the capacity to create knowledge. This strategy leaves the conventional concept of science largely intact, but it does open up questions about the context of research - who defines the questions, who studies who, what is classed as knowledge, etc.

The coherent self of modernist thought has come under increasing attack from those theorists who are grouped loosely together as post-structuralists and post-modernists. Since I am not dealing explicitly with post-modernism, it is not possible here to give a comprehensive account of these bodies of thought. I am locating them in terms of feminist epistemology, rather than engaging fully with all the issues involved. Much has been written on the topic, and expositions of these theories, and their uses and problems for feminists, can be found in Weedon [1987], Gunew [1990] and Nicholson [1990]. Feminist post-modernists have used the work of Lacan, Althusser, Derrida and Foucault to explode phallogentric notions of what Woman, hence women, is supposed to be. They argue that to retain the opposition of the terms man and woman is to perpetuate the essentialism of Western philosophy, and

thus seek to dismantle its terms, or attempt to speak or write from outside its discourse.

Chris Weedon, for example, advocates a feminist post-structuralism which

through a concept of discourse, which is seen as a structuring principle of society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity [is] able in detailed, historically specific analysis, to explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyze the opportunities for resistance to it. [1987:40-41]

This reliance on the concept of discourse, however, proves in certain circumstances to be a weakness, since it cannot recognise other ways in which power operates. As Michele Barrett asks, "Are we really to see the Peterloo massacre, the storming of the Winter Palace in Petrograd, the Long March, the Grunwick picket - as the struggles of discourses? [1988:95]

The most useful aspect of post-modernism for feminism is its anti-essentialist stance, since women have been fighting for years against confining ideas of femininity. Feminism is, however, in danger of producing an equally essentialist view of what women "really" are, in an attempt to counter ideas inscribed within patriarchal ideology. Post-modernism is claimed to counter this tendency. In espousing post-modernism, however, it is important not to ignore the work of women of color who

"played a vanguard role in reconceptualising the notion of identity, so that it becomes a more flexible term, capable of including the experience of people who... possess multiple cultural allegiances and, often, suffer multiple kinds of oppression" [Modleski 1991:19].

Modleski favours Teresa de Lauretis' formulation that the "essence" of woman is, and has always been, more of a project than a description of existant reality; this insight provides us with a way to hold on to the category of woman while recognizing ourselves to be in the process (an unending one) of *defining and constructing the category* (which... includes very disparate types of people). [1991:20]

The main strategy of post-modernism is deconstruction, a method of reading texts in which stable meaning is undermined, in favour of fragmentation, play and intertextuality. Christopher Norris, a major exponent of deconstruction within the field of literary criticism, however, argues against its "colonising drive" [1988:9], that is, its misapplication to other disciplines, pointing out that Derrida himself defended ethical, political and epistemological issues against their reduction to textual play. When transferred to other disciplines, therefore, "current ideas in literary theory provide at best a partial and at worst an actively misleading model" [1988:21].

The problem here is one of values. Postmodernism cannot be "for" progressive political values without "surreptitiously invoking the foundationalist positions in social theory they have explicitly rejected" [Soper 1991:101]. A similar point is made by Sandra Harding [1990], who argues that feminist post-modernists' belief in the possibility and desirability of progress for women ties them to the Enlightenment positions they criticise. For Harding, all feminists, whatever their positions, stand "with one foot in modernity and the other in the lands beyond" [1990:100].

Feminism, however, is based on women's experience of our own oppression. Feminist standpoint theorists, like Harding, argue that it is too early to abandon the idea that women exist as a social category and share certain aspects of an identity. Harding contends that standpoint theory is derived from Hegel, via Marx and Engels, for whom consciousness and knowledge claims are derived from the material position of the working class. Claims for feminist knowledge are therefore grounded in the material position of women.

The idea of a single feminist standpoint has been criticised for perpetuating the exclusion of groups of women who have been "other" to feminist theory - Black and working-class women for example - and for failing to take account of the variety of feminisms with which women identify [Stanley & Wise 1990]. From the post-modernist

position it has been attacked for remaining an "Enlightenment philosophy", that is, for remaining linked to essentialism.

Harding's defence is that standpoint theory avoids the dual pitfalls of claims to absolute truth or objectivity, and the relativism characteristic of post-modern thought. She calls for excluded groups of women to generate knowledge. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise also "refuse to buy the 'if you say "women" you say "essentialism" argument'" [1990:40]. They argue for "a deconstructed and reconstructed feminist standpoint epistemology, one which... insists on the existence of feminist standpoints" [1990:47]. This is an explicitly political epistemology and is linked to a view of the subject as both constructed by and constructing the material world and its meanings.

Standpoint theory offers the most useful base from which to make sense of the sense that the writers I interviewed are making of themselves and their experiences. In particular, it can account for their sense of putting themselves into their writing in a way that other epistemologies and their attendant theories of subjectivity cannot.

Notes

1) Wise is referring here to research done by female researchers on less powerful women. Her argument does not apply to situations in which the interviewee is more powerful than the interviewer, for example Carol Smart's [1984] research on judges and lawyers.

Chapter 3: Self and Text: Theoretical Considerations

As Gemma Moss argues, "identity, reading, writing are all somehow intimately connected" [1989:56]. In this chapter I will review some of theories which bear on these areas. The connections between them in practice will be examined in the case study chapters.

Reading and the Self

Theories of literature have rarely been concerned with what "ordinary" people do with what they read. Ken Worpole [1984] has pointed to this gap in working-class history and cultural studies and Tania Modleski [1984] has indicated the need for a feminist theory of women's reading. One body of theory to turn to in this endeavour is what is known variously as reader-response criticism, reader theory or reception theory.

Susan Suleiman [1980] locates the surge of interest in "the reader" which took place in the 1970s within a mood of self-reflexiveness within the humanities and a post-structuralism which challenged the idea of an autonomous, authoritative text-in-itself. These reader theories, often deriving from very different perspectives, attempt to analyse reading as a process and to view the text from the point of view of the reader, rather than that of authorial intention or the text in isolation.

Some feminists have argued, therefore, for "an articulation ... between currents in materialist criticism and the body of work known as reader theory or reader-response criticism" [Newton & Rosenfelt 1985:xxiii]. Similarly, in their introduction to Gender and Reading, Patrocinio Schweickart and Elizabeth Flynn draw parallels between feminist and reader-centred criticism, declaring them "alike in that they induce a heightened awareness of the way perspective conditions comprehension and interpretation. Perspective here signifies the capacity for certain insights as well as the limitation of vision" [1986:xxi].

Reader-response criticism is useful to me as it attempts to theorise the process of reading; both the ways in which people read and the effects that reading has upon them. As Jane Tompkins [1980] points out, however, reader-response criticism is not a single position, but an area of investigation. Differing theoretical positions lead to different conceptualisations of what exactly the reading process is. Wolfgang Iser, for example, proposes a phenomenological analysis of the reading process and stresses its interactive and dialectical nature. Iser's readers are motivated by a psychological need to recreate the text as a meaningful whole; that is, they search for a "Gestalt" through the processes of anticipation, retrospection, picturing and the search for consistency [1980b]. This approach stresses the reader's active participation in the recreation of the text, but, as Jane Tompkins points out, this activity "is only a fulfillment of what is already

implicit in the structure of the work - though how exactly that structure limits his activity is never made clear" [1980:xxiii].

In contrast to Iser's holistic approach, Stanley Fish is concerned with the language of the text, and what it does to the reader, that is, "an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time" [1980:73]. The reader is thought of as being constantly involved in the process of making sense of the language of the text, and could therefore be said to be rewriting it. Fish's second concern is with the operation of what he describes as "interpretive communities", which are "made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" [1980:182]. These communities are generally conceived of as academic groupings of one kind or another, concerned with developing critical strategies. They cannot, therefore, be used as a description of the way in which the majority of people read. The major exception here is the school, in so far as it can be described as an interpretive community. Certainly people are taught, both formally and informally, how to interpret texts, but in absence of detailed studies of how this process works, this idea remains on the level of conjecture.

So far, however, the "reader" has been assumed rather than

analysed, although more power is ascribed to her/him by Fish than by Iser. The greater the power of the reader, the greater the need for the focus to be turned on actual, rather than "implied" or "ideal", readers. The effects of the individual reader's psychological processes on the interpretation of the text is the concern of Norman Holland. Holland takes a psychoanalytic approach, analysing the responses of individuals in detailed case histories. He argues that each person has a particular "identity theme", which is formed in early life and remains unchanged from then on, so that each person "shows a deep and essential unity in his personality" [1975:53]. This theme will then affect their reading of every text. Texts that are enjoyed by the reader give pleasure because there is sufficient correspondence between the wishes and defences of the identity theme, and those within the text itself.

Like Freud, Holland remains baffled by women's responses. Within Five Readers Reading, the reader is constantly referred to as "he", and when it comes to the question of the influence of gender on the development of the identity theme, Holland remains undecided. Of his only female subject he writes:

There may be some identity themes that are inherently male or female (such as Erikson's concept of "inner space"), but no one, as far as I know, can say for sure as of 1975. To me, Sandra's identity theme seemed the same kind of statement as the male readers. [1975:101]

Women are seen as in some way different, and yet their response to literature is thought to be the same as men's. Given, however, that Holland's five readers were all students of literature at an American university, a question can be raised concerning how far the one woman in the study was actually reading "as a man", that is, in a manner taught and approved by a male-dominated institution.

The question of what it means to read "as a woman" is directly raised by Jonathan Culler. In "Reading as a Woman", Culler reviews the work of feminist critics, noting the argument raised by Carolyn Heilbrun, amongst others, that women can read as men, and Elaine Showalter's "hypothesis" of a female reader, which changes the kinds of reading which can be made of a text. For Culler, however, appeals to women's experience are appeals to an essence, so it is therefore necessary to deconstruct not only the text, but also the terms man and woman:

For a woman to read as a woman is not to repeat an identity or an experience that is given but to play a role she constructs so that the series can continue: a woman reading as a woman reading as a woman. The noncoincidence reveals an interval, a division within woman or within any reading subject and the "experience" of that subject. [1983:64]

The move away from essentialism is useful, but there are three main problems with Culler's work. Firstly, there is

the slippage (common to many critical studies) between the terms "woman reader" and "feminist literary critic". Secondly, there is a problem for feminists in the notion that a female identity could or should be abandoned. Finally, if reading as a "woman" can be problematised, so too can reading "as a man", but this point is not taken up by Culler and the problem is seen as once again residing with women.

This set of examples from a diverse group of writers demonstrates some of the concerns of, and problems with, the general area of reader-based theory. Possibly the most significant tension exists in the relative weight given to the reader and the text. Where exactly is meaning created? For Iser it is implicit in the text, while Fish credits the reader with "rewriting" the text and for Holland it is the identity themes of author and reader which are primary. In all these cases meaning is drawn out of or read into the text in a relatively peaceful manner. Jeff Adams, however, posits the reading process as one of conflict; the "imagination of the reader" and the "structure of the text" "clash", since the text "conspires with the language to direct readings which are appropriate to the culture while the reader struggles to use the text for personal ends" [1986:4].

This position has similarities to that advanced by Judith Fetterley in her study of American literature, whose canonical works, she argues, "constitute a series of

designs on the female reader" [1978:xi], through which she "is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded: she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself" [1978:xi]. Fetterley urges women, therefore, to become "resisting readers" [1978:xii].

The advantage of such an approach is that it enables us to recognise that "power is the issue in the politics of literature" [Fetterley 1978:xiii]. What it does not do, however, is analyse the effects that reading may have upon the reader. This point may be made of reader-response criticism generally. Tania Modleski [1991] warns against the individualism of a reader-response criticism which pays no attention to the ideological work the text performs.

Furthermore, "The Reader", whether female or male, resisting or otherwise, appears to spring fully formed into unchanging adulthood; often seeming to be coterminous with "the individual" of liberal humanism or with "the literary critic", whose position is outside both ideology and analysis. Even when children are the object of study, as they are for Bettelheim [1976] and Adams [1986], the cumulative effects of reading are not considered. While arguing that children use fairy tales to help them resolve psychosexual crises, the direction in which these crises are resolved is not considered; the effects of such a

resolution are ignored. For Adams, "the imagination of the reader" is "rooted in personal circumstance" [1986:4], but these circumstances are not delineated. For Holland [1975], the important formative experiences occur in the early years, creating an identity theme which is impervious to change. Reading, then, has no "effect" as such, being only an endless repetition of the same theme. There is also a huge gap between studies of children as readers and reading for children, and those of adult literature and reading processes.

Patrocínio Schweickart characterises the reading process as a dialectical and intersubjective process, in which reading becomes the mediating force between the consciousness of the author and of the reader. Despite having been based on a model for a feminist critic's reading of a female author, rather than on women's actual readings of authors of both genders, and despite the manner in which it plays down differences and conflicts between women, this dialectical model of reading is useful since it gives equal status to text and reader, and therefore opens the way to an investigation of how they may act upon each other. Each reader recreates the text in a unique fashion, reading it as a particular story, but there must nevertheless be something "there" in the text to which the reader responds, in ways which may concur or conflict with it. A dialectical interpretation also suggests that reading is an ongoing process; that a new synthesis is reached after each reading experience. It is therefore compatible with

the developmental approach I am arguing for.

So far I have not considered how exactly texts may operate upon the reader. For some theorists this happens because the text creates a tension by raising issues and questions which draw the reader on to the resolution. Other writers argue that the main mechanism through which readers become involved is identification. This is a term taken from psychoanalytic thought. It is defined as in clinical terms as the

process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified. [Laplanche & Pontalis 1973:205]

This process can take place with fictional as well as real characters. For Adams, therefore

Identification and projection are considered to be axioms underpinning the active nature of reading. From my point of view, however, projection and identification do not take place with just "any" girl character in any story, but with the girl character who has specific attributes in a situation whose structure and content are relevant to the reader. [1986:36]

This position is similar to Holland, who postulates that identification

takes place not because of external likenesses but because of internal matching of adaptation and defense within a total dynamic of response. We identify when a certain character (or even milieu ...) enables us to achieve a close matching of our own defenses within a total re-creation of our psychological processes by means of a literary work.

[1975:205]

These conceptualisations only hold for an identification which takes place on the grounds of similarity. Adams appears to assume that female readers can identify only with female characters. Holland represents an advance on this position, since he does not tie identification rigidly to gender. This is marred, however, by his previously noted ambivalence on questions of gender.

This question is addressed by Patrocinio Schweickart. Rejecting the idea that some male texts remain appealing to women because of their "false consciousness", she takes up Jameson's idea that the "effectively ideological is also at the same time necessarily utopian" [1986:42]. The ideological power of the text derives from the ways in which it harnesses desires which are present in the reader or which it creates. She explores this idea using her own responses to reading Lawrence's Women in Love:

The identification with Birkin is emotionally effective because, stripped of its patriarchal trappings, Birkin's struggle and his utopian vision conform to my own. To the extent that I perform this

feminist reading unconsciously, I am captivated by the text. The stronger my desire for autonomous selfhood and for love, the stronger my identification with Birkin, and the more intense the experience of bifurcation characteristic of the process of immasculation. [1986:43]

Schweickart argues, therefore, that a "dual hermeneutic" is in operation, having a negative aspect in women's complicity with patriarchy, and also a positive aspect in the utopian vision made possible by the text. It is the ability of each character to offer what Helen Taylor has called "a range of identification possibilities" [1989: 108] that enables different readers to put them to different uses.

Schweickart is considering her own responses here to "literature", rather than the genre fiction widely read by working-class people. Bridget Fowler suggests that a similar dynamic may operate here too, following Antonio Gramsci's suggestion that

in societies in which the lower classes are systematically denied control over their own lives and in which their surplus-value is constantly pumped out by capital, popular literature offers compensatory satisfactions - images of action and excitement to contrast with lives of drudgery and tedium [1991: 32].

Rachel Brownstein sees women's desire to be a "heroine" in similar terms:

Generations of girls who did not read much of anything else, whose experience was limited by education, opportunity, and convention have gone to fiction to escape a stifling or boring or a confusingly chaotic reality, and have come back with structures they use to interpret their feelings and prospects. [1982:xviii]

We may turn to reading for vicarious satisfaction, but this is not all we come away with. These structures may be both social and psychological. An adequate theory of reading, therefore, must take account of its dialectical nature, its cognitive and affective aspects and the subjectivity of the reader.

Writing and the Self

Working-class writing is one aspect of working-class language, which has been the object of both ridicule and of theories of inadequacy, and seen as objectifying social deprivation and disadvantage. Any study of the writing of working-class women is immediately complicated by the ways in which their language has previously been considered. Specific debates, originating in the 1970s, have centred on the concept of linguistic deprivation amongst working-class and Black children, in which the objects of debate have explicitly or implicitly been male. More recently there has grown up a body of work on gender and language or, more usually, women and language. In much of this work, however, women are discussed as an undifferentiated

group. It is therefore necessary to review these debates separately before attempting to bring them together. It is also necessary to consider language in general before discussing writing in particular.

Linguistic inadequacy has long been used as an explanation of the "ineducability" or low attainment of Black and working-class school pupils. In America the debate on linguistic deprivation focussed largely on ethnicity. The methodological deficiencies of investigations which examined Black children's language only in formal situations in which they were distinctly uneasy and at a disadvantage were exposed by William Labov and his team of researchers [1977]. Labov further identified the logical fallacies in the deficiency arguments built from these test results which asserted that Black children effectively had no language. To counterpose these data he demonstrated the verbal ability of Black children and youths in peer group situations, focusing on ritual insults and personal narratives.

In Britain the main focus of underachievement studies has been class, and the linguistic deprivation said to be suffered by working-class people. Perhaps the most influential figure in this debate is Basil Bernstein, who posited two separate language codes, the restricted and the elaborated. The former is descriptive and narrative, whilst the latter allows for conceptual organisation and symbolisation. The socialisation of working-class children

(particularly in the families of semi- or unskilled workers) was claimed to give them access only to the former, leaving them at a disadvantage in an education system which operated on the latter:

A child limited to a restricted code will tend to develop essentially through the regulation inherent in the code. For such a child, speech does not become the object of special perceptual activity, neither does a theoretical attitude develop towards the structural possibilities of sentence organisation and there is little motivation or orientation towards increasing vocabulary. ... The rigid range of syntactic possibilities leads to difficulty in conveying linguistically logical sequence and stress. [Bernstein 1970:134]

Bernstein's work has proved controversial. Some writers have believed it to be radical. Quintin Hoare, for example, argues that

Bernstein's work implies that class divisions are consolidated at a very much more intimate level than is usually imagined, and that schools serve to sustain the class structure by an exclusion of the working class child from the culture of his society in the most radical and dehumanising way conceivable, by alienating him in his speech - his elementary mode of communication with other people. [1977:49-50]

The problem here, however, is that middle-class culture is

assumed to be "the" culture of a society. This kind of thinking influenced many programmes of compensatory education. (1)

Other commentators such as Harold Rosen [1974] and John Edwards [1979] stress the inconsistencies and ambiguities within Bernstein's work which enable arguments from both left and right to be constructed around his findings. At one point Bernstein asserts that "one code is not better than another" [1970:135], while on the next page he refers to the "relative backwardness of lower working-class children" [1970:136]. Whilst M. A. K. Halliday uses Bernstein to argue for a socio- rather than a psycho-linguistic approach to the study of meaning, Rosen contends that Bernstein's approach is not social enough, since it ignores the influences of the media, work and working-class organisation, both cultural and political. Bernstein has also been criticised for expounding a theory of deprivation where in fact there is only difference [Keddie 1973].

Both Rosen and Edwards point to methodological difficulties within Bernstein's work, particularly his lack of detailed observations of how the elaborated and restricted codes actually operate in an educational setting. It becomes obvious that a much closer attention to context is needed. Edwards points out that "disadvantaged speech" may be a social liability in certain situations, but it cannot be argued that it is a cognitive or linguistic liability.

As Rosen argues, what is needed is an examination of "the relationship of the dominant culture of our society to the culture of the dominated" [1974:6].

Bernstein's work, together with a pathologised view of the Black family, has also been used to explain the under-achievement of Black children in the British school system. In Black British English, David Sutcliffe criticises Bernstein's notion of elaboration, arguing that there is no necessary relationship between the complexity of ideas and the syntactic complexity of the language used to express them.

The different approaches to Bernstein from the Left were possible because, as Raymond Williams pointed out, by the mid-1970s Marxism had "contributed very little to thinking about language itself" [1977:21]. Williams himself favoured an approach which concentrated on both the history of language and on language as a form of human activity. He drew on the work of Volosinov and Vygotsky, who eschewed the behaviourist conceptualisation of language as simple stimulus-response strings, and argued that language was essentially a process of making meaning, inherently social. Vygotsky distinguished between thought (pure meaning) and speech, arguing that they overlapped to create verbal thought which

is not an innate, natural form of behaviour but is determined by a historical-cultural process and has specific properties that cannot be found in the

natural forms of thought and speech. Once we acknowledge the historical character of verbal thought, we must consider it subject to all the premises of historical materialism, which are valid for any historical phenomenon in human society.

[1962:51]

Language can therefore be defined as "a dialectical process: the changing practical consciousness of human beings, in which both the evolutionary and the historical processes can be given full weight, but also within which they can be distinguished, in the complex variations of language use" [Williams 1977:44].

As Suzanne Scafe [1989] points out, Vygotsky's conceptualisation of language allows that conflict over meaning may take place. This is an important advance over sociolinguistic work by, for example, William Labov and Shirley Brice Heath:

What they want to assert is the equal richness and complexity of each language variety, so that languages are not labelled as inferior versions of a standard. They do not, therefore, examine the political fact that the historical contexts in which languages are produced mean that for the user their value is relative. They leave out all sense of conflict. [1989:43]

A separate, but equally contentious, debate has focussed on the relationship of gender and language. Traditionally,

this has largely been concerned with women's language, since studies of men's language have been assumed to be about "language" itself, whilst women's language has been seen as the problem: "from Jespersen in 1922 to Labov in 1972, women's speech was dealt with only in so far as it diverged from men's" [Cameron 1985:31]. From the mid-1970s, however, feminist theorists began to contest stereotypical characterisations of, and explanations for, women's language.

In Feminism and Linguistic Theory, Deborah Cameron identifies three main strands within this work. Firstly, there are liberal feminist approaches, such as that of Casey Miller and Kate Swift, who argue that sexist language is an anachronism which may be removed by substituting non-sexist terms for offending ones. In this way, language can be "reformed". This approach is, however, based on an inadequate theory of what language is, since it ignores the social contexts in which words are spoken, giving them instead an absolute meaning.

Other theorists (who would not themselves always choose the label feminist), such as Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva, base their characterisation of women's language on their readings of, and differences from, the psychoanalysis of Jaques Lacan, who contends that the impulse to language is born of lack, which can only be conceived of after the mother-child dyad has been disrupted by the father. Language and the symbolic order are

therefore dominated by the phallus, and boys' and girls' entry into language is different. The "feminine" becomes that which is outside of and disruptive to the masculine symbolic order, though not necessarily the exclusive property of women. Men, too, can produce feminine language, as women can produce patriarchal language.

Radical feminists, like Dale Spender, however, believe that language is a cause, rather than a symptom, of women's oppression. Women are alienated from a "man-made language" which teaches us our place in the world. Since men control meaning, authentic female language is impossible and women are thus silenced. The main problem that Cameron finds with this work (and this criticism has also been applied to Bernstein [Urwin 1984]) is its tendency towards linguistic determinism. The Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, that language determines thought, originates in the work of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf who, from their studies of native American societies in the first half of this century, concluded that: "No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality" [Quoted in Mandelbaum 1949:622].

Cameron cites a number of arguments against linguistic determinism. Firstly, from the work of Noam Chomsky, the idea of "linguistic universals" which proposes that all people have similar mental apparatuses predisposing them to language, thus stressing what people hold in common,

rather than what divides them. Secondly, there is the case of second language learning, which would be near impossible under the determinist hypothesis. Finally, and for Cameron, most importantly, there is the characterisation of language use as a creative activity and the linked phenomenon of language change. Determinists see language as a static, monolithic force; the Lacanian view of the child as "entering into" language is revealing here. Language is therefore implied to be outside of, rather than possessing a history. A historical analysis is required by a materialist perspective.

The most influential proponent of a feminist determinist argument is Dale Spender. In Man Made Language, Spender argues that "the English language has been literally man made and that it is still primarily under male control" [1985:12]. Cameron believes that Spender is correct in recognising the significance of human agency in linguistic practice, and identifying the "underlying semantic or grammatical rule whereby male is positive and female negative, so that the tenets of male chauvinism are encoded into language" [1990:13]. The main problem with this approach, however, is that it argues that language determines thought, but that men pre-exist language in so far as they have been able to construct its meanings and use it for their own ends [Black & Coward 1990]. It also ignores the extensive differences in language use between various groups of men and women; sexual difference is the only difference which counts.

Cameron rejects determinism and argues instead for the use of Roy Harris's "integrational" linguistics, which acknowledges that language is a creative process, embedded in a social context. Her use of this theory demystifies language and allows us to see that men do not control language and meaning in any absolute way, but that the linguistic power they are able to exercise stems from material circumstances, which have enabled them to control the institutions which have codified language. Cameron also makes the point that while in Western society the majority of women have not been denied literacy, they have historically been denied access to particular registers or discourses, and at times to writing itself [Spofford 1981].

Cameron's characterisation of language is useful for my project, since it acknowledges that women are both competent and creative users of language, while simultaneously being oppressed by linguistic structures. She also makes a connection between the ways in which women are "disadvantaged" as speakers with the ways in which minority ethnicities and working-class people are also disadvantaged. This is a necessity for recognising the specificity of working-class women's relationship to language, and represents an advance on many of the theories reviewed, which deal with "working class", "Black" and "women" as mutually exclusive categories. What the approaches outlined above share, therefore, is a commitment to language as a creative, historical, social

phenomenon, through which people may be disempowered, but which is open to expressions of conflict and thus to change.

So far, however, no explicit distinction has been made between spoken and written language. It is frequently assumed that the acquisition of literacy qualitatively changes the nature of cognition. This is held to be the case for children, adult learners and whole societies, although as Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz [1981] point out, to characterise these processes as identical is not helpful. Many theories of child development stress the role of language in the development of children's thinking. The developmental psychologist Jerome Bruner, for example, believes that language plays an essential part in the development of logical thought.

Projects to teach adult literacy frequently claim a liberatory function for learning to write. The most famous case here is the work of Paulo Freire, whose literacy projects amongst the Latin American peasantry involved a process of "conscientization":

"Conscientization" is more than a simple *prise de conscience*. While it implies overcoming "false consciousness", overcoming, that is, a semi-intransitive or naive transitive state of consciousness, it implies further the critical insertion of the conscientized person into a demythologized reality. [1972:75]

The liberating function of literacy acquisition is given a cognitive and an affective component by Jane Mace in her discussion of adult learners in Britain:

The narrative writing of directions led Roger to analysis and questioning. The process of writing itself made him active. [1979:86]

In the act of writing and acquiring an audience someone can change their entire idea of themselves, abandon their low-self esteem, assert their right to be heard. [1979:88-89]

What Mace is referring to here is a particular context in which writing is made public, although the effects of this context are not explicitly addressed.

Walter J. Ong has schematically characterised the differences in thought which he argues result from being a member of an oral or of a literate culture. Orality is thought to be unanalytic, conservative, unobjective and situational rather than abstract. He too views writing as a form of consciousness raising, and argues further that "without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials... In this sense, orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing" [1982:14-15].

The division between so called simple and advanced societies is also accepted by Jack Goody, who links a sense of the "pastness of the past" [1968:34] and the development of democracy with the spread of literacy. John Oxenham [1980] stresses the communicative and interactive

potentials of literacy, but remains tied to a modernisation theory which posits the benefits of literacy in bringing "underdeveloped" societies within the range of Western "progress".

What is lacking in these studies is a conceptualisation of the context in which literacy is transmitted and the purposes to which it is put. There is no necessary link between literacy and "conscientization"; it has to be continually forged. This point is made forcefully by Brian Street [1984], who notes the ideological nature of literacy practices. He argues that there are two models of the acquisition of literacy, the autonomous model which views literacy in a vacuum, as a process of "civilisation", and an ideological model, which concentrates on practices of literacy which may be either hegemonic or liberatory, depending on their political context.

Street bases some of his work on the evidence of cross-cultural studies by Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner [1974], who analysed the Vai society in which people become literate in non-school situations. They argue that the cognitive changes claimed for literacy are a result of schooling rather than literacy as such. Cole and Scribner ground their work in the theories of Vygotsky, who contended that "higher mental processes", such as voluntary memory, active attention and abstract thought, are "organised into functional systems, which arise in the course of historically determined practical and theoret-

ical activities and change with the nature of these activities" [1974:31]. This view is based on "Marx's thesis that man has no fixed human nature but continually makes himself and his consciousness through his productive activity" [1974:30].

This approach suggests a way of studying both language and literacy which avoids the twin traps of either characterising certain groups of people as deficient or inadequate, or of making an "attempt to rescue, to make working-class families 'equal but different', [which] denies oppression in a liberal endeavour to produce equality out of a misplaced pluralism" [Walkerdine & Lucy 1989:7].

Many cognitive approaches to the psychology of writing refer to particular forms of writing, usually functional rather than creative uses of literacy; but they do not always make this distinction clear [Brice Heath 1981]. They concentrate on the process of composition as a problem-solving exercise, and may be concerned explicitly with educational issues such as student performance [Martlew 1983; Bereiter & Scardamalia 1987].

The potential permanence of written language makes it into an object that can be set aside and returned to. The need to use structures not present in spoken language, such as grammatically correct sentences and paragraphs, focuses the writer's attention on construction in a way that rarely happens in speech. This is particularly so for

people who do not often need to write in this way. Writing is slower than speech, there is no need for an instant response. There are no immediate interpersonal or contextual demands. A writer can take as long as she likes to choose a word or finish a piece. She can change it as often as she wants. This again encourages reflexivity. The process of editing is important here. The writer can reread and analyse what she has written. Once the ideas have been transformed into a product, detachment is encouraged, though new writers often find this difficult to achieve.

Goody [1968] argues that written language is permanent and manipulable in a way spoken language is not. It allows greater scope for reflection, correction and change, and may enable the writer to integrate modes of expression from other written genres; its conventions facilitate the telling of certain stories in particular ways, but since language is not a monolithic entity, stories may be rewritten to express or create new truths. Writing does not have an immediate audience other than the writer herself, and so may enable the writer to give form to what had previously been untellable. If published, it gives the writer access to a mode of expression more socially valued than speech, that is, the power of print.

Psychoanalytic approaches to writing are concerned with its affective component. In "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming", Freud [1959] stresses the connection between

creative writing and both childhood play and adult day-dreaming, the process of wish-fulfillment in everyday thought. This account is useful in that it demystifies the process of writing, and minimises the difference between writers and non-writers. Since Freud, however, locates the reason why some people become writers and others don't in the psychic structure of the individual, he is unable to deal with the social factors which influence this process.

In writing, daydreams are given external form. The therapeutic function of writing lies in the creation of a coherent narrative, and the creation of meaning out of seemingly arbitrary events. Freud, however, is referring to material which the writer "makes up", whereas I am interested in material which has been generated out of the writer's conscious experience. The pleasure of transformation, therefore, is partly cognitive, in that it involves a transformation of meaning. Writing is not, however, governed simply by free association. Ideas are generated within understandings of what stories are and how it is possible to give them a form. Some of the pleasures which accrue from writing are derived specifically from social understandings. They would not be possible without some notion of what genres are supposed to do. The claiming of the romantic story by older women, for example, is an affirmation of their social experience as well as their psychic structure.

As a companion to Fetterley's "resisting reader", Linda

Anderson posits a "resisting writer":

It is necessary to take into account the fact that the woman who attempts to write herself is engaged in by the nature of the activity itself in re-writing the stories about her since by seeking to publicise herself she is violating an important cultural construction of her femininity as passive or hidden. She is resisting or changing what is known about her. [1986:59]

This process is not, however, confined to women. All people who have been excluded from the definition of "a writer" are making challenges by claiming the term and process for themselves. Cole and Scribner [1974] argue that it is perhaps most correct to think not of a single absolute literacy, but of a series of different literacies. In these terms, becoming a writer involves taking on a new literacy.

I have argued that it is important to consider the context of any kind of literacy or writing practice, so it is necessary here to say something about writers' groups which have played some part in the writing my interviewees have produced, and the development of their ideas of what it means to be a writer. In these days of mass literacy most people have some idea of what being a writer means, since from schooldays most of us are required to write stories and to transform our own experience into a written text, even if only on the subject of "what I did during the school holidays". There is a distance, however,

between this and being a "real" writer, and writers' groups exist partly to bridge this gap.

Some of the pieces I discuss later owe their existence directly to writers' groups, which may have provided the topic, or the forum within which certain stories become tellable. The group provides an audience, and therefore operates in a manner like Stanley Fish's "interpretive community". Writing tends to be valued not simply for the technical proficiency it demonstrates, but for immediacy and authenticity; experience is valued as a way of breaking down cultural stereotypes. These groups produce certain kinds of understanding, since they focus on self-understanding and understanding of society and history; indeed "the purpose of such writing is a making sense: not a making beautiful or making entertainment but a making of sense for the self and for others" [Morley et al. 1982: 92]. This leads to a variety of autobiographical practices and the simultaneous creation of an understanding of the meaning of identity.

Theories of autobiography have been developed by male theorists, reading the works of other men [Jelinek 1980]. What happens to the story of autobiography when women's words are considered, or those of Black or working-class people? According to James Olney [1980], theoretical consideration of autobiography was initiated in 1956 by Georges Gusdorf. Gusdorf argued that the autobiographical impulse derives from a particular moment in Western

culture, when Christianity met the Classical Era, giving rise to a consciousness of "the singularity of each individual life" [1980:29]. Important "metaphysical preconditions" [1980:30] included the transformation of the mythic to the historical framework of thought, the Copernican Revolution, the invention of the mirror and the rule of confession, transformed by the Protestant Reformation.

For Gusdorf, the defining elements of an autobiography are its temporal reconstruction of a life and its hermeneutic intention. The "original sin" [1980:41] of autobiography, however, is its imposition of a coherence on the life story. The act of interpretation leads the author to assign meanings to events in accordance with a pattern perceived at the time of writing, which may not be the same as the original meaning/s these events held. Roy Pascal takes up the concept of coherence and links it to an interrogation of the idea of autobiographical "truth" and the relationship of past to present. For Pascal, coherence implies that the author reinterprets the past from a particular standpoint in the present, thus: "Autobiography is then an interplay, a collusion, between past and present; its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past" [1960:11].

While there may be both factual and psychological truth in an autobiography, these are not the most important forms

it takes, which is rather

the truth in the confines of a limited purpose, a purpose that grows out of the author's life and imposes itself on him as his specific quality, and thus determines his choice of events and the manner of his treatment and expression. [1960:83]

It is the particular purpose of writers' groups which helps shape the autobiographical practices which take place within them.

The individualism at the heart of Gusdorf's theoretical perspective has been criticised by Susan Stanford Friedman, who argues that

the individual concept of the autobiographical self that pervades Gusdorf's work raises serious theoretical problems for critics who recognise that the self, self-creation, and self-consciousness are profoundly different for women, minorities, and many non-Western peoples. [1988:34]

Women write in consciousness of being defined as Woman, and after a particular pattern of socialisation has produced their gendered identity. This knowledge of the self as different from the dominant cultural representations has been characterised as a "dual consciousness" by W E B du Bois and Sheila Rowbotham:

Alienation is not the result of creating a self in language, as it is for Lacanian and Barthesian critics of autobiography. Instead, alienation from

the historically imposed image of the self is what motivates the writing, the creation of an alternate self in the autobiographical act. Writing the self shatters the hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech. [Friedman 1988:41]

This point is also made by the authors of The Republic of Letters. Being consigned to a group identity, if rewritten from anonymity to solidarity, allows a move beyond alienation. This is also the conclusion of Celia Lury [1991], commenting on the type of writing produced in women writers' groups, such as those at Commonword. Lury argues that texts are valued in these groups because they represent collective, rather than abstract or unique, ideas of identity and experience. This is what is meant by "authenticity".

In terms of the autobiographical canon, autobiography is judged on the ability of the author to stand as a representative for her/his times, which women have generally been debarred from doing. Men project a self-confidence and a linear pattern to their lives, which is absent from women's experience: "the final criterion of orderliness, wholeness, or a harmonious shaping with which critics characterize autobiography is often not applicable to women's autobiographies" [Jelinek 1980:19].

Mary Jo Maynes explains this phenomenon by reference to the founding fathers of the genre. Rousseau and Goethe

wrote of the "ascending line" [1989:105] of the developing personality out of the newly formed class consciousness of the bourgeoisie. This model of the success story is not available to the working-class women whose autobiographies she analyses. It appears only as a "counter-narrative" [1989:113], an invocation of lack, particularly in childhood. Other models were available to these women, however, particularly through an oral culture of storytelling.

Working-class men and women have, however, historically shared the vision of what it means to want to be a writer:

Writing autobiography is frequently itself part of a more general expression of the desire to write, to be a writer. This is a class formation in which the working woman shares with the working-class man a particular attachment to the metaphor, the writer, as an expression of class aspiration and of subjectivity. [Swindells 1985:174]

Writing today remains a potential means of upward social mobility for women. During the Thatcher years the influence of the enterprise culture was felt in the number of books explaining to women how to succeed in business, while remaining feminine [Tincknell 1991]. These had their fictional counterparts in the likes of Barbara Taylor Bradford's bestseller A Woman of Substance. In these books femininity, plus a gritty determination, made it possible for the heroine to "have it all" [Newman 1991]. The

glamorous life-styles of the authors of these books were paraded as success stories of capitalism. One woman I interviewed wants to write romantic fiction and realises that while the romantic book market is a competitive field for new authors to break into, it is also highly lucrative.

Female difference from male models is also noted by Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck in their discussion of "authority" in the autobiographical text. They are critical, however, of theories of difference in autobiography (such as Domna C. Stanton's exploration of autogynography) which do not deal with differences between women, which "ignore the crucial referentiality of class, race and sexual orientation" [1988:13].

These works raise the question of the nature of the canon of autobiography and of the genre as a whole from which it is composed. Pascal [1960] draws a distinction between autobiography proper, and other autobiographical writings, such as poetry, diaries, travel and war experiences. These are precisely the forms to which women, judged incapable of producing autobiography, have had to turn [Peterson 1986]. Peterson argues that it was the legacy of spiritual autobiography which proved the stumbling block to women's autobiographical writing in Victorian times. The Pauline prohibition on women's speech, reinforced by the popular conduct books of the day, meant that they were thought, and may have believed themselves to be, unfit for such a

project.

This has led some women to argue that the fault lies within the definition of autobiography. Celeste Schenck, for example, argues that

Certain forms of women's poetry and autobiography can be read coextensively, in a manner that profitably destabilizes theory of mainstream autobiography and calls into question the patriarchal determinants of genre theory more generally. [1988:281]

All of the women I interviewed wrote at least some poetry, and for two of them it was their main work. Doreen believes that all her writing is "autobiographical in some way" [A3:127:8], and there are ways in which the poetry can be read as autobiography; it has both a chronology and a hermeneutic purpose. Marsha's poems are about "real life" [A4:171:23]. Elizabeth Wilson [1986] argues that the term "literature of experience", covering both autobiography and certain novels, is more appropriate; other women use the term "self-writing" to refer to the variety of ways in which the self may be constructed on the page. In the light of the above discussion, these terms prove more useful for categorising the kinds of writing the women I interviewed produced.

The question of the definition of the category "women" is also important. Women, the working class and Black people are frequently written about as if they comprised discrete categories. The relationship of women's texts to studies of working-class autobiography raises such definitional

problems. David Vincent's important study of working-class autobiography during the first half of the nineteenth century is framed in a way that meant he was not likely to find many women's texts to fit his definitions [Swindells 1985].

Studies of working-class autobiography have also been found guilty of failing to allow psychological complexity to its subjects, and the conventions of the genre itself, the dominant story of "us and them", makes it difficult for tales of conflict between "us" to be told [Steedman 1986]. Jo Spence [1989] writes of the need to account for the development of both class consciousness and the class unconscious, to account for subjectivity in terms of both "I" and "We".

Dolly McPherson, in her study of Maya Angelou [1991], points to the roots of Black autobiography in America in the need to bring about social change. There coexists within the texts, therefore, both a personal motive in terms of the need for self-esteem and affirmation in a hostile world, and the social motive of attempting to change that world. Despite much of Angelou's experience being gender-specific (rape, single motherhood, prostitution), however, McPherson refers her writing back to themes common to all Black autobiographers, such as the pattern of the quest and the themes of individual, family and community.

What is clear in this work, however, is the connection the author makes between writing and the creation of identity. This does not pre-exist the moment of writing in a straightforward way, there to be revealed by the text, but is discovered and defined during the writing process: "Germaine Bree calls this 'becoming alive to oneself through writing'" [McPherson 1991:4]. This connection is also made in much writing on women and autobiography. Studies of working-class autobiography tend to concentrate on the terms of consciousness, specifically class-consciousness, rather than those of subjectivity.

"Women come to writing, I believe, simultaneously with self-creation" [Heilbrun 1989:117]. Heilbrun's argument here concerns the uses of stories, not lives, as models, and the circumstances under which women may create new stories, particularly through "oral exchanges among women in groups" [1989:46]. This sense of re-writing existing stories is also stressed by Linda Anderson, who links the practice of autobiography with the practice of psychoanalysis. Both involve a particular relationship of past and present, memories and reminiscences transformed into words, thus giving "the self a history" [1986:55]. In neither is identity "pre-given" [1986:56], but is rather a construct: "Inevitably autobiography as the attempt to write the self, or give the self a narrative, is deeply bound up with... questions or questionings of identity" [1985:58].

Neither is the story of the self there to be discovered, it has to be constructed out of what is to hand, a way has to found to tell it. Liz Stanley refers to the "social, not psychological, understanding of the self as both fragile and continually renewed by self-conscious acts of memory and writing" [1990b:63].

Echoing Maynes, Julia Swindells argues that working women lack both the models of social advance and of solidarity through work. They need, therefore, "to construct subjectivities by calling on particular representations, particular genres, in which women are at least visible, though frequently in a reified, idealized form" [1985:140]. I would argue that this "turn to the literary" is still important for women, although the genres which they may use to construct their subjectivities have changed since Victorian times.

For working-class women genre fiction, popular literature, is likely to be the most important. Gunther Kress [1982] has argued that in learning to write, children learn first the rules of the genres they are taught, particularly the fairy story. In Unpopular Fictions, Gemma Moss argues that

By deploying a particular genre and watching what it throws into relief, young writers are speculating about the future and working out how it could be understood in terms of what they already know. They are playing with meaning. [1989:114]

Identity

Autobiography, therefore, exists at the intersection of reading, writing and a sense of self. What kind of identity is it that can be constructed in this way? A sense of selfhood is comparatively modern. It is crucially related to ideas of human agency and of "inwardness", which developed from the beginning of the eighteenth century. Our thoughts, feelings and unconscious are believed to exist inside us. There are depths we can explore, that we do not know in advance, and from what we find we create a self. As Charles Taylor [1989] acknowledges, however, this account concentrates on the level of ideas, rather than on their relationship to the material world. This world is also essential to the development of the self, of particular kinds of selves, produced in part by social divisions.

There are two terms available for this sense of self, identity and subjectivity. Whilst not entirely coincident, both have their particular uses and stresses. The authors of Changing the Subject, for example use the term subjectivity

to refer to individuality and self-awareness - the condition of being a subject - but understand in this usage that subjects are dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices and produced by these - the condition of being subject. [Henriques et al.

1984:3]

For Chris Weedon, it refers to "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" [1987:32].

This subjectivity is "produced in a whole range of discursive practices - economic, social and political..."; it is a "site of discontinuity and conflict.." [1987:21]. The emphasis on the ways in which we are kept "subject to" capitalism and patriarchy is useful, but may be made at the expense of a theorisation of human creativity and agency; the subject being nothing more than the sum of the subject positions it inhabits. This is the anti-humanist sense of the self produced through discourse.

The term identity is one of those apparently simple notions which on closer inspection becomes increasingly complex. This is largely because of the number of different uses to which it is put. An identity may be a set of personal characteristics, a shared social position, a type of politics. Identification is a psychoanalytic term for incorporating the traits of others. Within Freud's work it is "the operation itself whereby the human subject is constituted" [Laplanche & Pontalis 1973:206]. We identify with other people and with characters in books and films and this may mean sympathy, empathy, a shared understanding, or a desire to be the same. Identities are made, bought, claimed, fought over. In post-modernist terms they

may shift, flicker or fluctuate.

The term identity also has a problematic place within feminist politics. It was used first to denote a group identity, a set of shared characteristics and a shared experience, the basis from which women could resist their oppression. There were two main problems with this position, however. Analyses of women's oppression were usually developed by white middle-class women who took their experience as paradigmatic and developed theories based on the exclusion of "other" categories of women [Carby 1982; Moraga 1981]. Even when differences between women were brought in to the theoretical picture, "difference" was still seen as belonging to women who weren't white and middle-class [Spelman 1990]. There also tended to develop hierarchies of oppression, in which certain identities carried a particular moral weight [Ardill & O'Sullivan 1986; Adams 1989].

Both the psychoanalytic and the feminist concepts of identity have been criticised for being essentialist, for clinging to the idea of a real self or true sexual identity beneath the veneer of social conditioning. The problem for feminism is to keep some notion of "women" which recognises the material reality of oppression and around which feminists can campaign, whilst refusing ideas of an eternal feminine (even a feminist version) and without collapsing the variety of women's experiences into one monolithic category in which the experiences of some

women have primacy.

Feminist post-structuralists claim that their theories evade these problems. Denise Riley [1988], for example, argues that we are all "fluctuating identities". Whilst recognising the value of the anti-essentialism of Riley's argument, Liz Stanley identifies a number of problems with her approach. To abandon the use of categories in analysis, as Riley seems to suggest, discounts the use of sociological explanation of any kind. She also

portrays as essentialism the differing and sometimes multiple identities painstakingly constructed in the very recent past, by lesbians, older women, women of color, disabled women, and working-class women (to name only some). What must it be like to be a black woman, having gone through much to have named oneself thus and to have recovered something of the history of one's foremothers, to have it implied that this is not only not enough but an intellectual error, an ontological oversimplification to have done so? [1990a:153]

Like Stanley, there are other feminists trying to find a path out of the seeming impasse between a feminism based in essentialism and a deconstructionism which leaves no room for feminist politics. Sandra Harding's feminist standpoint theory is one such example, as are the theoretical reformulations of Linda Alcoff and Teresa de Lauretis:

When the concept "woman" is defined not by a particular set of attributes, but by a particular position, the internal characteristics of this person thus identified are not denoted so much as the external context within which that person is situated. [Alcoff 1988:433]

Thus

If it is possible to identify women by their position within this network of relations, then it becomes possible to ground a feminist argument for women, not on a claim that their innate capacities are being stunted, but that their position within the network lacks power and mobility and requires radical change. The position of women is relative and not innate, and yet neither is it "undecidable". [Alcoff 1988:433-434]

This definition leaves in the positionality stressed by post-modernists, whilst allowing space for the use of "experience" as a means of analysing this position. Experience in this sense is used as "a critical effort to open up ideological contradictions..." [Weed 1989:xxv].

For Teresa de Lauretis, identity is best conceived of as a process, not an essentialist statement but "a personal-political strategy of survival and resistance that is also, at the same time, a critical practice and a mode of knowledge" [1986:9]. Consciousness (of self, of class, of race) is therefore "a particular configuration of subject-

ivity, or subjective limits, produced at the intersection of meaning with experience" [1986:8]. Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty engage in a close reading of Minnie Bruce Pratt's autobiographical essay "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" to elucidate their idea of the "fundamentally relational nature of identity..." [1986:195]. These insights are important because both psychic and social levels are recognised, and because cognition and agency are not denied. Identity can thus be the beginning of analysis, not its end point.

Laplanche and Pontalis argue that the Freudian concept of identification is not a cognitive process [1973:205]. The process of identification may still be taken to be central to the formation of identity in the sense outlined above, however, if it is expanded to include both conscious and unconscious levels. It can then be used to include the social and the cognitive, essential to a feminist definition. Identification with other people, with characters in literature, enters the scene as a way of experiencing the self and a way of thinking through one's social and psychic position, and reading and writing are acknowledged as important constitutive processes in identity formation. In the chapters that follow, I will outline the ways in which this process has taken place for some working-class women writers.

Notes

1) In Britain these were centred on the five educational Priority Areas which operated between 1968 and 1971. Schools in these areas offered special programmes devised to compensate children for the supposed inadequacy of their home backgrounds and enhance their educational prospects [Halsey 1972].

Chapter 4: "Crying Out on Paper"

I A Life History

Kate was born in 1917 in Lonpopty near Bangor in North Wales. She spent her early years in Stretford and Timperley, at that time a village in rural Cheshire. The illegitimate daughter of a woman in service and a policeman from a "very good family" [A1:10:9], she lived mainly with her maternal grandmother or an aunt while her mother was away working. She only met her father twice. Despite being relatively happy, Kate would be very upset when her mother had to leave her and would run away from wherever she was staying to try to find her:

I used to be very upset and the first thing I used to do was run away. I was always running away, down drainpipes, the lot, you know. Many a time in the early hours of the morning when I was about six I'd run into the arms of a policeman... [A1:2:16-21]

Kate remembers her mother through the eyes of her childhood: "I adored my mother, adored her. She was beautiful, she was talented and well known. She was kind to me. She loved me" [A1:2:11-13]. At Timperley Kate's mother found work with a richer member of her own family which allowed her to keep Kate with her. Her health was not good, however, and she died when Kate was nine. As Kate described it, her world "collapsed". [A1:3:22] It is this event, however, which Kate also perceives, both in the

transcript and in her manuscript, as being the beginning of her story.

This story begins with her being taken, on the decision of her family, to live with her brother's wife in Salford, in a place and at a time richly documented by Robert Roberts and Walter Greenwood; much of her testimony echoes theirs. The change in environment was almost total: from a rural backwater to a shabby dwelling in the heart of what was known as "the world's first industrial slum" [Roberts 1982:10].

Roberts' mother had described her coming to Salford from the countryside in the 1890s as a "disaster" [1982:10], to which she never became fully reconciled. Even within the generalised poverty of the Salford slums, however, there were recognised and agreed layers of status. As Roberts wrote: "Division in our own society ranged from an elite at the peak, composed of the leading families, through recognised strata to a social base whose members one damned as 'the lowest of the low', or simply 'no class'" [1977:17].

The household to which Kate was taken would have ranked fairly low on this social scale. Her brother was in the army, hence away from home most of the time, so his wife lived with her mother (who Kate came to call Gran) and father, and physically and mentally disabled brother (allegedly injured as the result of a failed abortion).

The older woman had originally been a bargee in the Wolverhampton area and she and her friends "dressed very much like gypsies" [A1:4:21-22]. Her husband was an invalid living in an upstairs bedroom, so she earned money from taking in lodgers and from attending local births and deaths, a position she had earned by virtue of the nurse-midwife being too "friendly with the bottle" and therefore usually "kettled" [A1:4:28-5:1]. The younger woman worked in a nearby mill.

There was no sense of childhood as a special time or of a child requiring different consideration from an adult. No affection was shown, nor any attempt made to make Kate feel welcome or at home. She was simply a new addition to the household who must find her place as quickly as possible and make herself useful. Neither was there any recognition of Kate's bereavement or of what she might be suffering as a result of the loss of her mother. The attitude shown was that life was hard but you just had to get on with it.

Life was difficult for such a household and Kate was immediately expected to justify her place there, first by doing housework and later by working at a mill and helping Gran when she delivered babies: "I was nothing more or less than a drudge and I know that" [A1:11:14-15]; "when I was eighteen, nineteen years of age I was helping boil the water and that for many babies born" [A1:4:25-27]. This work awakened the desire to be a nurse which remained

unfulfilled because of the cost of training.

Kate received some schooling in Sale and Timperley which she enjoyed, but at this time schooling did not have the significance it was to acquire later. She remembers clearly her later experiences at Trafford Park Girls School. Home life was so difficult for her then that she enjoyed the time spent there: "I never wanted to go home from school. I loved school because there was the escape from the hell of a childhood that I was experiencing" [A1:8:21-23].

Despite the evidence which suggests a widespread dislike of school by working-class children (1), not all were cowed by the system nor provoked into outright rebellion. Some, like Kate, took an interest and pride in schoolwork and derived some pleasure from learning. She remembers her relationships with her teachers as basically good, although she was occasionally caned. They counted among the few people who showed her any kindness: "I had a healthy respect for my teachers... They put themselves out for me. They took me away like they used to take some of the girls away for the weekend" [A1:8:20-25].

This experience coincides with the pattern found by John Burnett in his study of working-class autobiographers:

Happiness at school is recorded less frequently by autobiographers than unhappiness. When it occurs, it is usually associated with a kind and able teacher

who develops a child's imagination as well as affection, with being interested in the lessons and performing well at them, and with achieving some success... [1982:156]

School therefore provided an escape for Kate on a variety of levels. It gave her a reason to be out of the house for a number of hours in the day. It provided the occasional respite via a weekend away at Haworth, where her interest in the Brontes was kindled, and other places in Yorkshire. And through the medium of reading and writing (in which her teachers encouraged her), it gave her the resources to escape imaginatively from her home circumstances.

The encouragement Kate received at school was not matched at home, however:

Oh I was encouraged to read and write but I couldn't do it at home. See it was bucket and scrubbing brush and errands, you see, unless... I got in the corner and if you got in the corner it was "a bookworm", the book was... taken off you [A1:11:9-13]

Indeed it would have been unusual if the response to Kate's activities had been any different. As Roberts records:

There were, of course, many working-class homes where music and literature had long held honoured place, but at the lower levels reading of any kind was often considered a frivolous occupation. "Put that book down!" a mother would command her child,

even in his free time, "and do something useful".

[1977:50-51]

Elizabeth Roberts stresses the importance of the family as the primary agent of socialisation of the working-class child, and notes that

if the family, and most importantly parents' expectations, attitudes or beliefs were in conflict with those in authority then it was very likely that the children would follow their parents' standard rather than those of the teacher, policeman or vicar. [1984:26]

Kate seems to have been in an unusual position again here, since her values concerning education and the "finer things of life" seem to be closer in line with those of her teachers than with those of her surrogate family. This discrepancy may be partly explained, however, by reference to her earlier years and a home life where these issues were treated with respect.

These differences were highlighted when the quality of Kate's singing was discovered by her teachers:

And they developed it and then approached the people I was living with for me to have my voice trained, but it was out of the question, obviously. They didn't have time for niceties like that. They didn't know the role of music. Because music is like love, music and love go together. [A1:9:1-6]

Household economics may well have played a part in this

decision, but cannot totally account for it, since Kate in later years discovered that her father used to send money for her keep. There was also the question of whose needs came first. As Elizabeth Roberts notes: "In the working-class family familial considerations were of much greater importance than were individualistic ones: the good and well-being of the family came before the gratification of individual desires" [1984:34].

A further reason for Kate's rejection of the values and lifestyle of those around her may have been her deep unhappiness with her circumstances. This "refusal" would have been the only form of rebellion open to her. Her unhappiness resulted partly from the "collapse" of her world after the death of her mother, but also partly from the additional trauma of being sexually abused. Given the silence that surrounded sexual matters at the time of Kate's childhood and the difficulty many abuse survivors find in relating their experiences, references to abuse such as those in the transcript and, more explicitly, in the manuscript are rare in working-class autobiography. In Elizabeth Roberts' study "only one respondent hinted at incest, and then very obliquely. It remains a taboo subject, about which it is impossible to ask and about which no information is volunteered" [1984:16].

Robert Roberts notes the fear of incest that existed when large families were crowded into two bedrooms. In the Salford slums, incest was an open secret:

Only in late teenage did we discover that the closed community, like the family, could hold skeletons in its cupboard. The damned houses were those where, neighbours knew, incestuous relationships had borne a fruit which walked the streets before their very eyes... Such sin, of course, had to be recognised in whispered *tete a tete*; but I don't recall a single prosecution: strict public silence saved miscreants from the rigours of the law. [1977:43-44]

John Burnett's treatment of the subject is more problematic, since he collapses abuse and exposure into a general category of "sexual experience". There is still, however, little mention of these occurrences:

Only a few writers record direct sexual experiences at an early age. Two young girls mention molestations by men at the age of four and five, and their mixture of puzzlement and fright is a similar reaction to that expressed at cases of male exposure. [1982:47]

In Kate's discussion of the abuse that she and others around her suffered, there is a recognition that abuse does not simply equal incest; that there are many ways in which a child may be abused, including mental abuse. This conceptualisation has more in common with present day attitudes and definitions than has the work of Robert Roberts or John Burnett, and it is obvious that Kate is filtering her past experience through a framework of

ideas developed in the 1980s. The inclusive nature of modern definitions is illustrated by Emily Driver and Audrey Droisen, who argue that "we take child sexual abuse and incest to be any sexual behaviour directed at a person under 16 without that person's consent" [1989:3]. Many of the behaviours described in Kate's writing fall into this category.

The current awareness of child abuse has made it easier for Kate to find a way of disclosing (to use a modern term) what had happened to her. This process may also be affecting other women of her generation and it is possible that with time we may uncover a whole history of child abuse. In the meantime, testimony such as Kate's is rare, and she is hopeful that it will be useful to other women in helping them to break their silence:

in many cases... children were molested. All the evils that are here today were there then, you know... [A1:3:9-10]

Now during those early years I was brought into [contact with] people that were quite willing to molest a child. I was brought very near to that but I don't think that it ever happened to me, nearly, but not quite. I learned to be wary of men because in my childish mind at ten you don't know that men are bad, you don't know and when a man used to say, perhaps a member of the family as it was, "Come and sit on my knee" warning bells, you know, used to ring. But you don't think anything about it. It

isn't until they start to touch the body that you edge away [A1:3:25-4:7]

There are many thousands of little children, not only... are they abused bodily, you can be abused mentally... [A1:4:11-13]

Kate began work at fourteen in the local mills and lived with Gran until her death after which she moved to Evesham, working in service and then in a canning factory. In 1947 she married a divorced soldier, but the marriage was not happy. Again in her descriptions of that time Kate stresses the abuse she and her children suffered. She believes that her husband took advantage of her "disadvantage with men" [A1:6:7] and "led the children a dog's life" [A1:7:6-7].

Despite the circumstances, Kate stayed within the marriage for a long time, trying to be what she believed to be a good wife and mother. It was necessary for her to undertake paid work for most of this time, and after the birth of her first daughter she spent five years in Wales, where she had moved on marriage, working in hotels. Her husband was posted abroad at this time, and Kate lived in while her daughter was boarded out. Her husband then claimed to have found a home for them and they moved to Stratford. When she arrived, however, he confessed that this was not the case and the next fourteen years were spent moving from place to place, within this area, wherever work and accomodation could be found. Another daughter and a son

were born. Eventually when her husband's drinking became a problem, Kate left him and brought the children back to Salford. She supported the family by cleaning and working as a barmaid.

Kate felt that her upbringing, combining the ignorance considered proper at the time with experiences which left her uncomfortable in the company of men, had left her unprepared for the kind of marriage in which she found herself:

I had a vague idea obviously what went on, but I probably could never give you see, because of the suppression. This is what suppression does to you- it stays with you all your life if you've had a childhood like that, like mine, and this is what my husband spotted, and he thought he could mould me to what he wanted but he didn't. He damn near broke my spirit in the process but in the finish I up and left him. [A1:9:20-27]

In the 1920s and 1930s ignorance in sexual matters was still considered to be desirable in children and equated with "purity". Robert Roberts remembers the effects of this attitude:

What did a child know? Who was he mixing with? How much "filth" had he picked up? Constantly our elders feared, yet they blocked every rational source of information. "Children learn", they told one another, "soon enough!" So millions went into

marriage either ignorant or with ideas utterly distorted. [1982:51]

This memory was echoed by Elizabeth Roberts:

Discussion or even mention of sexual matters by or to children was not only lacking in respectability; it was verging on immoral. Decades of Victorian attitudes had produced, by the turn of the twentieth century, a generation of working-class parents who were extremely prudish. [1984:15]

Since retirement, however, Kate's life has improved. She now has time for pursuits she enjoys and finds meaningful. She campaigns for the Spastics Society and other local charities, is on the Community Health Council and has recently joined the Labour Party. She also joined the writers' group which led to her decision to write an autobiographical novel.

II A Story Worth Telling

The writers Walter Greenwood and Edna O'Brien and the popular television soap opera Coronation Street have helped Kate in coming to see that there is a general and historical interest in both the time and the place in which she grew up:

Salford was a very colourful place. No wonder so many northern people become famous, because they lived the humour, they lived the pathos, they lived the poverty, they lived it all. They didn't have to research it. It was there. [A1:5:5-9]

Kate views Coronation Street as a historical rather than a contemporary representation of Salford life, and links the decline in its ratings to both the north-south and the class divide:

it is now getting on the rest of the country's nerves, not because of the programme but because they don't want to know what it represents. Much of Coronation Street does not represent us as we are now, but it does a lot and I love it... [A1:5:19-24]

This comment is interesting in the light of analytical work on the programme: "The nostalgic tone of the serial consigns any lingering effective class consciousness to something that, to all intents and purposes, is in the past" [Dyer 1981:5]. This sense of the past is strength-

ened by the programme's own history of remarkable continuity:

Clearly, soap operas do offer audiences a stability which is somewhat rare on television. A casual viewer switching on at 7.30 pm on a Wednesday will find Coronation Street going on after nearly 30 years, regulars like Ken Barlow and Emily Bishop still suffering from the same problems and responding in the same way; Ien Ang's correspondents valued the way in which regular characters provided familiar pleasure in Dallas. [Geraghty 1991:133]

Marion Jordan links departures the programme makes from its realist mode to those in Dickens, who had a similar tendency to caricature. Dickens counts among Kate's favourite authors. Terry Lovell counts among the programmes pleasures for female spectators the creation of strong, middle-aged, financially independent female characters, for whom the romantic dream of a lasting relationship is found to be impossible:

In a sense, the conventions of the genre are such that the normal order of thing in Coronation Street is precisely that of broken marriages, temporary liaisons, availability for "lasting" romantic love which in fact never lasts. This order, the reverse of the patriarchal norm, is in a sense interrupted by the marriages and "happy family" interludes, rather than vice versa. [1981:50]

Kate's life is therefore validated by the programme on

several levels.

Kate's conception of history is therefore much bound up with narrative, with individual stories. History belongs to people, as much as people belong to history. Many other "ordinary" women, however, are not so able to perceive their stories as interesting, or at least believe that others would not be interested. Mrs. Irwin, interviewed by Ford and Sinclair for their book on women's attitudes to ageing, demonstrates this attitude: "I could write a book on my life from the time I was able to write. I know it wouldn't be very exciting I don't suppose for other people" [1987:146]. It is necessary therefore to attempt to understand where Kate's sense of herself as a person with a story worth telling has come from.

One experience which placed Kate outside the ordinary was that of sexual abuse. For most of her life she remained silent on this matter, keeping it a secret. With adults as with children this knowledge of having a secret, even such a terrible one, contributes to a sense of difference, and thus of interest. There is also the related hope that revealing the secret will help other women relieve the burden of their own stories: "I have got something to say which might benefit somebody else. Please listen to me" [A1:33:3-5].

The use of personal testimonies in helping other women and in building theories of abuse is recognised in a recent

book which includes the autobiographies of eight survivors. The therapeutic value of speaking out is introduced in this context: "This loss of fear, the electrifying feeling of finally being able to share and speak openly with others who can truly understand, has over and over again been what survivors say has helped the most" [Driver & Droisen 1989:69].

This is a story which it has only recently become possible to tell, since a climate has been created in which the child is believed. Much of the thinking on the subject of abuse has been influenced by psychoanalytic theory. Freud originally believed his women patients' stories of childhood abuse. He later either abandoned, through a failure of courage [Masson 1984] or internal conflict [Rush 1980], or at least became ambivalent towards [Bernheimer & Kahane 1985], this "Seduction Theory", favouring instead a model of psychic life built around the role of fantasy and the Oedipus Complex. Misplaced application of this later theory led to abused children being cast as liars, or as suffering from an unresolved Oedipal crisis, since it was thought that all children had fantasies of seduction by their parents, which may be recast as memories, rather than recognised as memories of fantasies.

The influence of psychoanalysis, however, is not wholly detrimental. The assimilation into the wider culture of the Freudian idea of the case history may provide a way of

telling a life story. As Marcus points out, the telling of a coherent life story, rather than the acting out of hysterical symptoms, is a way of constructing the "truth" of a life. He views Freud's writings as the apex of

a culture in which the various narrative and fictional forms had exerted for centuries both moral and philosophical authority and which produced as one of its chief climaxes the great bourgeois novels of the nineteenth century. [1984:62]

The ability to tell a consistent story is considered the mark of psychic health and a means of self possession, both of which Kate strives for: "At the end - at the successful end - one has come into possession of one's own story. It is the final act of self-appropriation, the appropriation by oneself of one's own history" [1984:62]. Since few working-class people can afford, even if they so chose, to undertake psychoanalysis, writing may function as an analytic alternative; the way by which people can come to understand "why I am as I am" [A1:12:11].

A further influence on Kate becoming a writer is the stories she has heard and read as both a child and an adult and which have resonated through her own life, giving her both the idea of a life worth narrating and a number of structuring ideas through which to tell her tale. These will be discussed in detail later. The Mormon religion, to which Kate turned in later life, has contributed in a similar way, giving her the sense of being

valued, at least, by her Creator and of a life unfolding according to a narrative or plan. Instead of a random string of events, Kate is able to see a kind of pilgrim's progress, the trials and tribulations of her early life leading her to greater understanding later.

In this her work is similar to that of earlier working-class people who wrote within the genre of spiritual autobiography. This genre developed out of the religious and social crises at the time of the Civil War and continued through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Knowledge of God was believed to come from knowledge of the self and introspective thought the way to achieve this: "The recollection and interpretation of past actions was both the preliminary and permanent duty of every Christian" [Vincent 1982:16]. The spiritual autobiography was part of the individual's direct unmediated relationship with God, and every human, however humble, was encouraged to use its form [Vincent 1982].

In this way, people came to have a sense of themselves as having a past, a story; and autobiography became an important arena for self-interpretation. As Vincent points out, however, while retaining the tradition of spiritual autobiography, the worker writer added a "secular understanding of the meaning of the past" [1982:19].

There is also a tradition of women writers, who although largely middle-class, came to writing through their

involvement with religion. Ellen Moers [1977] notes Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell. Kate shares with them a sense of personal worth nurtured by religion.

Finally there is the role played by other people who have encouraged Kate to write her story. These supportive figures have, with the exception of her son, all been women and the concept of encouragement, both received and given, recurs regularly throughout the transcript. Initial encouragement came from her teachers at school. Encouragement to begin writing as an adult came from her daughter. And encouragement to write her life story came from the tutor and other members of her writers' workshop.

It has frequently been noted that elderly people spend much of their time reminiscing and many authors have speculated on the social and psychic purposes this serves. Robert Butler, for example, characterises the process as the "life review" and conceives of it as

a naturally occurring, universal mental process characterised by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and, particularly the resurgence of unresolved conflicts; simultaneously, and normally, these revived experiences and conflicts can be surveyed and integrated. [1968:487]

While any claims for universality are dubious, this definition of the process has the advantage of rescuing it

from its status as a symptom of old age, and emphasising its usefulness for the person involved. It is also seen as an active, creative process:

Reconsiderations of previous experiences and their meaning occur, often with concomitant revised or expanded understanding. Such reorganization of past experience may provide a more valid picture, giving new and significant meanings to one's life; it may also prepare one for death, mitigating one's fears.

[1968:489-490]

Erik Erikson extended Freud's notion of psycho-sexual stages of development, conceptualising the human life cycle as a series of psycho-social stages, each of which contains a conflict or dilemma which the person must resolve in order to proceed successfully to the next stage. Successful resolution of these conflicts leads to the development of a strong sense of identity in the post-adolescent years.

The final stage of Erikson's scheme corresponds with the later years of adulthood. This stage he designates as the conflict of Ego Integrity versus Despair and Disgust. The task of an individual here is to develop an integrated view of her past and a sense of acceptance of both past and future. Erikson defines integrity as "the acceptance of one's own and only life cycle and of the people who have become significant to it as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions"

[1968:104].

Carol Gilligan criticises Erikson for taking a male model of development by which to measure women's psychological "success". She draws heavily on the work of Nancy Chodorow to argue that women's identity formation is fused with the process of attachment and men's with that of separation. This is the source of the difference which is generally interpreted - within as widely differing developmental schemes as those of Freud, Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg - as a lack or deficiency on women's part. Erikson's first stage, Trust versus Mistrust, is centred on attachment and lays the basis for successful intimacy and generativity in the later stages. Other stages up to adulthood, however, stress the need for separation, and therefore "attachments appear to be developmental impediments" [1982:12-13].

Erikson further believed that the process of identity formation was delayed for women after adolescence, while they waited for the right man to come along, with whom they could merge their identity. Gilligan criticises him for assuming female identity to be a cypher to be filled by the male and for noting differences in the female and male adult life-cycles, while keeping the male model of development as the model. In this way, she argues, Erikson constructs women as deviant.

These criticisms, however, relate largely to the earlier stages of development and Gilligan does not turn her

attention to the process of ageing in women. While Erikson's scheme has serious flaws and cannot be applied wholesale to women's lives, his conceptualisation of old age does help to make sense of the psychological tasks which Kate and others find themselves faced with in their later years.

The "Ego psychology" of Erikson has, however, been criticised for its stress on the rational processes of consciousness, and its concomitant lack of attention to the irrational and the unconscious which some writers believe to be the most radical element in Freud's work (2). The emphasis is on the creation of stability, rather than on the possibilities of instability. The converse stress on fluctuation, however, is guilty of an equal neglect of the conscious mind and its processes. Theories of the unconscious cannot account for the conscious intellectual and creative elements in Kate's work or for the social situation of a working-class writer attempting this kind of project.

In her writing, Kate is asking herself the question, "How have I survived to become the person I am?" This question also preoccupied her during the taped interview. On a number of occasions the question of survival, physical and psychic, was openly addressed:

Looking back, one would wonder how children... I'm going back to [the] late 1920s, how they did survive. [A1:3:14-16]

as I said it [leaving her husband] was a matter of survival [A1:9:28]

I was extremely timid and putting it quite bluntly, one wonders how people like me survive. Why don't we try suicide or something like that? But we don't try that ever. Why do we go on when the darkness is so thick that there's no glimmer of light at all? Why do we overcome being exploited by so many people in our life and yet come out moderately decent human beings, decent citizens? [A1:20:4-11]

The question of integrity is important to her:

I also valued friendship and loyalty, integrity, still do. Integrity means a lot to me. Without it there's not much hope for us. [A1:7:24-26]

I don't want to lose what little integrity there is, I don't want to lose that. It's not much use in the world today, integrity, but to me it means one hell of a lot. [A1:37:26-38:1]

She also uses a language in conversation which is plainly analytical:

I went down from Timperley, living at Timperley, to Salford. Now that in itself was a big, you know, jump - different environment altogether - but as I was to learn later these people formed a lot of my character. [A1:3:2-6]

But by far and large at that time I couldn't see it... I wasn't to see it until later on. This was

the strengthening. [A1:3:21-24]

Only now, since I'm writing my life story am I finding out why I am as I am. [A1:12:10-11]

Erikson argues that the aquisition of integrity includes "a new and different love of one's parents, free of the wish that they should have been different" [1968:104]. In Kate's case their absence has allowed her to keep an idealised view of her parents; but contained in both the transcript and the manuscript is an attempt to come to terms with significant others in her life, which is part of her striving for integrity:

[Gran] was very remarkable, she couldn't read or write but here she was gifted with the understanding of births, marriages and deaths... [A1:4:22-24]

I'd also lived with [Gran's] youngest son who, through no fault of his own, had either been tampered with with before he was born, they said it was due to needles, was paralysed and had the mentality of a child. He was disfigured, poor lad, and he had three rows of teeth, you know. And imagine seeing something like that at nine years of age. See I also had to deal with for all that he was a man. [A1:11:25-12:5]

Salford people are smashing, even though there's good and bad in everything. But they were the salt of the earth. [A1:14:9-11]

This attempt to come to terms is not fully successful,

since Kate resorts to the "hearts of gold" stereotype of working-class psychology, contradicting her own experience of cruelty. It may, however, be the best available way for her to express the complexity of the "good" as well as the "bad".

In conversation, Kate talks of the death of her mother, although recollections of their life are not included in her manuscript, which begins only after her mother's death and does not describe it. In both cases, however, Kate demonstrates an awareness of how bereavement has affected her personality, both in its own terms and in terms of the changes in her environment which it precipitated. This is in marked contrast to earlier working-class autobiographies reviewed by David Vincent. Other than one man, none of the writers: "offer any connection, explicitly or implicitly, between their experiences of death in childhood and their subsequent personae as adults" [1982:57]. This change reflects a wider shift in attitudes towards death, which has now come to be seen as a crucial experience in forming the personality, and changes in the understanding of what a "person" is.

In order to attempt the task of making sense of both herself and the others around her, Kate has to devise for herself a psychological theory; in particular a developmental theory. Drawing on psychological terms which are also part of everyday language, she engages with the nature-nurture, or heredity versus environment, debate in

order to explain the difference between herself, with her love of "the finer things of life" and "those people" native to the Salford slums. This difference is explained in terms of, on the one hand an inheritance of "good traits" from her parents: "I was like [Dad]. He was a good man, so evidently I've inherited the traits from Mum and Dad" [A1:10:17-19]; and, on the other, personal experience:

despite the hardships [the people of Salford] went through the fundamental things of life that goes to make a decent person of you were taught me. [A1:3:12-14]

I probably could never give [in marriage] you see, because of the suppression. This is what suppression does to you, it stays with you all your life if you've had a childhood like that... [A1:9:20-24]

Kate thus develops an interactionist perspective which allows her to examine the effects of the environment on the development of the personality, while retaining a sense of herself as "special". Her conceptualisation of childhood as a time of innocence and trust: "in my childish mind at ten you don't know that men are bad" [A1:4:2-3]; "the simple point is that you cannot place into a child's mind the seeds of disloyalty" [A1:7:19-20]; is held in contradiction to both the ideas of childhood held by the adults around her and her own experience of unsought-for knowledge. She is also aware of the possibility that trauma in childhood may be repressed: "I was

brought into [contact with] people that were quite willing to molest a child. I was brought very near to that, but I don't think that it ever happened to me. Nearly, but not quite" [A1:3:25-4:1].

This statement is apparently contradicted by the passage in the manuscript where Kate describes being sent upstairs to collect the tray on which Gran's husband's meal was taken to him in bed:

The old man raised himself from the pillows Kate drew back, what happened next terrified the child pulling back the bedclothes exposing his lower body he grabbed the small hand placing it between his groins holding it firm despite her struggle to free it "Let me go Kate sobbed. please let me go, he released her laying back on the pillows "Its no use saying anything you know they wont believe you [M:14]

This discrepancy may be explained, however, by reference to the word "molested", which Kate seems to use to mean things which are done to the child or actual rape, rather than things which the child is made to do.

Both these sets of ideas, about human nature and about the nature of childhood, are explicit in the transcript, while remaining implicit in the text of the story as written so far. As Kate herself acknowledges, both the life story and the theories necessary to explain it are still in the process of being worked out. The act of "getting it down

on paper" is crucial here.

Kate clearly used the interview as part of this process of sorting out and making clear. An autobiography is an organic entity in the sense that it grows and develops over the time in which the author engages in the work of thinking and writing it. She used the opportunity of a listener to say what she felt was important to be said. Answers to questions often led a long way from the original issue. The pattern of the conversation is therefore very similar to that between Kathleen Dayus (another working-class autobiographer) and Mary Chamberlain [1984], in which Dayus uses the questions put to her as loose starting points for a chain of ideas or even virtually ignores them as unnecessary interruptions.

This leads to the question of why Kate finds it necessary to write her life story rather than relating it orally. A number of points are significant here. As has been noted by Ford and Sinclair, older women often find it difficult to find an interested and attentive audience. A decline in memory may make it difficult to hold all the significant points in mind at the same time. Writing is a way of preserving the self for the self.

Writing may be a way of externalising and letting go of painful events. The concept of acknowledging and releasing pain is central to many therapies and it is likely that writing serves a similar therapeutic function, important

for older people in the creation of an "integrated heritage" [Erikson 1968:140]. Kate has the added sense that her writing may be of benefit to other women who have shared her experiences: through her writing she may help them to come to terms with their own past.

The issues of writing and ageing have been examined by Kathleen Woodward, who takes a psychoanalytic view of the production of a story: "In a fundamental sense, of course, as Freud and Lacan have taught us, all narrative has to do with loss in the past" [1988:108]. She cites Peter Brooks view that "narrative has essentially to do with the recovery of the past" [1988:109], but questions the role of desire in this process. Kate's writing is a recovery of her past, but made with specific purposes. The loss of the edenic pleasure (the garden imagery testifies to this) of life in Timperley with her mother is what marks the beginning of the narrative. Without the loss there would be no story. Kate's desire, however, is not to recover her past, but to interpret and come to terms with its more painful aspects. In this sense it has similarities to the stories of the hysterics within Freudian case histories; the aim is to appropriate one's story for oneself. In another sense, though, the story is not simply there to be possessed. It has to be created, and this involves an artistic and an interpretive act.

To acknowledge the therapeutic function of writing is not necessarily to devalue its creative aspect. Throughout her

life, Kate has found her creative and intellectual ambitions frustrated. Despite the problems which old age can bring (3), for Kate it brought an "independent income and a room of her own". In pondering the question, "Why do women write?" Kate demonstrates an awareness of the economic factors constraining women's, and particularly working-class women's, artistic endeavours. She answers her question: "Is it to express ourselves? We can't do it any other way, we haven't got the money" [A1:8:7-8].

Kate has, therefore, turned the retelling of the story of her life into a creative act, mediated by a number of literary devices which will be examined in the following sections. Concern that her writing should be found worthy according to standard literary criteria has led Kate to join both an English Language class and a writers' workshop. Writing is thus not a solitary act, but a means of making contact with other people. Alongside her continuing voluntary work, these activities form part of Kate's attempt to lead a full and meaningful life during retirement. The importance of this kind of activity was underlined by Ford and Sinclair:

As we see in the interviews these women work hard to construct a satisfactory life for themselves. But what is also apparent is that the relationship between the various needs in their lives is a complex one. Status, self-respect, and interest come from interacting with others in a way that conveys a sense of value and enjoyment. These activities also

give a sense of personal control and choice.

[1987:152]

Writing for Kate is therefore a multi-faceted activity, performing a number of important functions in her life. As a means of "expressing herself" it is linked to her gender, her class and her age. Most importantly perhaps it allows her to construct herself as a person with a story; a story which is of interest to others, thus bringing a sense of worth to her life and staving off the "despair and disgust" which could otherwise threaten to engulf her.

As David Vincent notes, many working-class autobiographies were written as, or perhaps justified as, instructional books for children. This strategy for deflecting the presumptuousness of becoming the author of one's own story has not been confined to working-class writers, nor to autobiography. In The Wrongs of Woman, Mary Wollstonecraft has her distressed and isolated heroine, Maria, unjustly incarcerated in an institution for the mentally ill, turn to writing as the only solace she can find:

The books she had obtained, were soon devoured...

Writing was then the only alternative, and she wrote some rhapsodies descriptive of her state of mind; but the events of her past life pressing on her, she resolved circumstantially to relate them, with the sentiments that experience, and more matured reason, would naturally suggest. They might perhaps instruct her daughter, and shield her from the misery, the

tyranny, her mother knew not how to avoid. [1980:82]

While supposedly directed to her daughter, these reflections are the means by which Maria can attempt to comprehend her situation. The question of, "How have I come to be as I am now?" is the same as Kate's, but different in that Kate is interested in her ability to have survived the past, while the fictional Maria is concerned with how she will survive the future. In both cases, however, the process of writing the past is integral to the development of a sense of selfhood in the present.

For Kate though, writing for her children is not the central purpose, nor does she intend to "instruct" them. In so far as her writing is addressed to them, it is an attempt to explain herself to them; to let them know what her story is, and why she is the mother she is:

my son only rang me on... Wednesday night just as I'd come in from writing class and he, I happened to tell him and he said, "I think it'll be a horror story, won't it Mum?" You see, so I said, "Well, it's all going down", I said, "every bit". He said "Good for you", but he has no idea... [A1:13:28-14:6]

This intention, the need to be understood by her children, is also expressed by the popular working-class writer, Kathleen Dayus. After much hesitation, Dayus decided she would write her life story:

Let the children read it when anything happens to me, realize what I did go through. I've never told them. I couldn't tell them, I couldn't sit down and tell them unless they asked, and they never asked, and I couldn't tell them, you know, everything. I'd think, it's too hard, it would upset them to tell them. So I thought, well I'd write it down and let them read it, see for themselves. [Chamberlain 1988:63]

Writing is in this sense a breaking of silence, a means of communicating what could not otherwise be said, to people to whom it could not be admitted. For a mother who has spent much of her life being strong "for the children", it can be particularly difficult to admit vulnerability and hurt. Where there is a great emotional investment, however, there is also a need for personal recognition. Kate is concerned that her children should know her as a person in her entirety.

III Literary Influences

While writing undoubtedly has a number of psychological functions for Kate, it is necessary to stress that she is also engaged in a creative act. She has produced, and had published, a number of poems and short stories apart from the autobiographical piece on which I have chosen to focus. I have made this choice because Kate clearly sees it as her most important work. She often refers to her life story as a novel based on her life. It is important to turn our attention to the text she has produced and look at the ways in which it may be described as "literary". Kate has filtered her past experiences through a set of ideas she has gained from reading; that is, through a literary framework. While there can be no direct and unmediated link between what Kate has read, watched or heard, and what she has written, it is interesting to look at what literary models were available to her in structuring her tale, and what use she has made of them.

i) Fairy Tales

Kate remembers being told fairy tales by her mother. Fairy tales, the modern descendents of more ancient folk tales, are known by almost every child and form part of each child's entry into culture. Many tales were in fact rewritten in order to provide appropriate "civilising" material for children, but have managed to retain their magic and popularity because they still "ferret out deep-rooted wishes, needs, and wants and demonstrate how they

can be realised" [Zipes, 1979:ix].

On being asked which was her favourite tale, Kate hesitated slightly, then chose Cinderella: "Maybe perhaps Cinderella because she reminded me a bit of me" [A1:18:25-26]. It is not surprising that a child in Kate's situation should feel attached to the Cinderella story. The writer we are dealing with, however, is not a child but an adult looking back on childhood. We are dealing with an imperfect human memory and must recognise that the way the world seems, looking back on it now, is not necessarily the way it was then. Memory is, above all, a reconstructive process. The stories that Kate remembers best are not necessarily the ones of greatest meaning for her at the time, but more importantly are the ones which are of the most use to her in structuring her story as she writes it now. What we need to look at, therefore, is the way in which they do this.

There are a number of schema, from a variety of disciplines, available for use in interpreting a fairy tale. Bruno Bettelheim [1976] argues that the fairy tale aids the child in "his" search for meaning in life and solutions to complex psychic problems. He points to the parallel messages of fairy tales and of psychoanalysis; that life may be difficult and people may be bad, but that the individual can triumph in the end. Both systems help the person to find wholeness, but fairy tales do this in a way children can understand, speaking to their conscious

and unconscious minds simultaneously.

While it appears that children, and perhaps adults, do use fairy tales in this way, Bettelheim's analysis has two serious failings. As Zipes [1979] points out, Bettelheim talks of "the child" as if all children were interchangeable. He ignores the influences of class, race and gender, which lead different children to find different meanings in the same story. He also fails to take into account both social history and the history of the particular child, which in Kate's case is likely to have a definite bearing on how she interprets stories and what meanings she makes from them.

A further problem with Bettelheim's approach is that having established this category of "the child" he then imposed an orthodox Freudian reading on all the tales, which is the only reading the child is thought to unconsciously make of them. Cinderella is thus a story about sibling rivalry, the ashes symbolising both the pre-oedipal attachment to the Mother (at the fireside) and mourning at its loss, and the dirtiness of the cinders representing the oedipal desire for the Father. At the end of the story, the putting on of the glass slipper represents her acceptance of her femininity and the inevitability of marriage.

A similarly determinist reading of fairy tales, although from a totally different perspective, has been developed

by Andrea Dworkin. She argues that fairy tales are the first way in which patriarchal culture begins to structure female submission:

The point is that we have not formed the ancient world - it has formed us. We ingested it as children whole, had its values and consciousness imprinted on our minds as cultural absolutes long before we were in fact men and women. We have taken the fairy tales of childhood with us into maturity, chewed but still lying in the stomach, as real identity. [1974:32-33]

Cinderella, in Dworkin's terms, is a tale about an archetypally "good", that is, passive woman being persecuted by her wicked, that is, active Step-Mother while her good Father is absolved from blame. Eventually she is rescued by her Prince. From this tale then, and others like it, women learn "the cardinal principle of sexist ontology - the only good woman is a dead woman" [1974:41].

What neither Bettelheim nor Dworkin leave space for is an individual response to the text by a particular child. To state this is not to argue that a text is not an ideological weapon, but to argue for a more complex understanding of human psychology than one which allows a text to act in a uniform, transhistorical way.

This leads on to the question of what meaning Kate is likely to have taken from the story of Cinderella. It is unlikely that the story will have spoken of sibling

rivalry and oedipal conflicts to a child whose only brother was so much older than her that he could not have been a rival, and whose mother was dead and father almost unknown. Similarly the message of female passivity is likely to have been an empty one to a girl who was a drudge in a household of working women where the role of passive invalid was played by a man. This girl grew into a woman who had to work all her life, both inside and outside the home.

I would argue that what Kate sees the tale as being about is a motherless child who is forced to act as a drudge for those who take the place of her good Mother. The girl has a natural and moral superiority to those around her, and this is finally recognised and rewarded. This reading would give Kate the basis on which to identify with Cinderella and find vicarious satisfaction in the "happy ending".

As Zipes points out, folk tales originated amongst the powerless peasantry who were generally unable to resist their oppression and so developed utopian endings to the tales. A similar sense of powerlessness pervades Kate's telling of her story:

Well thought Kate how am I supposed to feel I don't want to go anyway but I can't do anything about it.

[M:4]

Kate was terrified of what Pem would say. [M:7]

There was no way to escape from this awful person.

[M:10]

She wanted to tell her what happened, but somehow
Kate knew she would not be believed. [M:14]

As a child the hope of a magical solution would have been available to her in a way which it is not available to an adult.

Kate's story also uses a number of other devices common to fairy tales. She chooses to start the story at the point in her life immediately following the death of her mother, in other words at the point of disruption of her life. Propp's analysis of folk tales led him to argue that they shared a basic underlying structure, moving from an original harmony through disruption to harmony again. The death of a parent is a typical event which sends the hero on her or his particular journey, quest or trials, and in doing so marks the beginning of the plot. Kate could have chosen to represent her earlier, happier years, but instead made a choice consistent with the fairy tale genre.

While Kate does not have a wicked step-mother, or a pair of ugly stepsisters, she emphasises the ugliness and lack of affection in the people she lives with. Mrs. Watkins has a "rasping voice" and snores like a "porky pig": "she was lay on her back on the other bed. her mouth was wide open. her grey hair was covered with a scarf, her face flushed and damp. her large bosom heaved with each snore" [M:18]. This contrasts sharply with the young child in the

other bed, still and quiet and saying her prayers, then later crying for lack of affection:

Well you can get yerself into bed. you'll be alright
Kate nodded, there was no goodnight kiss before Pem
left the room, "Oh how she wished her Mama was here.
she had nearly always read her a story before she
tucked her little daughter up for the night, and
"Mama" always kissed her goodnight. [M:15]

The language which Kate uses to describe her journey from
Timperley to Salford is also reminiscent of fairy tales,
full of contrasts between large and small and light and
dark:

The leafy Cheshire countryside gave way to the main
city road to Salford as the lorry rumbled past city
streets with row upon row of grimy little terraced
houses, gaunt mills and warehouses that stood like
Giants on the landscape [M:5]

as [the lamplighter] touched each gas mantle a blue
glow which within seconds turned to a golden gleam
shone along the street like the gleam of golden
droplets on the cobblestones [M:16]

Like Cinderella, the drudgery of her life is also emphasised. She is put straight to work and it is made clear that idleness will not be tolerated:

Now my wench you had better learn to call me Grandma
Watkins. She thought to herself I'll soon have this
kid toeing the line never fear. [M:11]

Pem turned to her small sister-in-law remarking "Are you going to sit there all day? Go upstairs and fetch the tray down Dad's in the side room [M:13]

The issue of Cinderella/Kate's self-perception as superior to those around her slides in the text into the realms of moral superiority. The child is portrayed saying her prayers and talking to her dead Mama, while the rest of the household gamble their money on the horses. This contrast is likely to be drawn from the adult Kate's reaffirmation of her Christianity, as much as from any childlike faith the younger Kate might have had.

Although not a fairy tale, the story of Peter Pan and Wendy is a "children's story", with all the difficulties of the term suggested by Jaqueline Rose [1984]. Kate sees the story as being about "the ability to fly off, the ability to transport oneself from surroundings. Not a bad thing that, you know, to transport yourself, you can transport yourself anywhere" [A1:18:27-19:3].

This must have provided a powerful fantasy of escape for the child Kate, and remains an imaginative resource of the adult. Rose suggests that the element of repetition in the story indicates that something "with which it is impossible to deal" [Rose 1984:38] is at stake. Danger is diffused by the returns home. In Kate's story these dynamics work in reverse, safety is found in leaving the home, not in returning to it, but the pattern retains a

psychic resonance.

ii) Life as Gothic Text

While the fairy tale speaks to the unconscious minds of children, the Gothic novel, it has been suggested, works in a similar way for women: "It seems that the Gothic form allows us - as readers and as writers - to express the conflict for which patriarchy has no name" [Fleenor 1983:28]. In terms of both its authorship and its readership, the Gothic is considered a "women's genre". Feminist literary critics have discerned a tradition of "female Gothic" in which narrative and metaphor both consciously and unconsciously reflect the conflicts faced by women in a patriarchal society. It is necessary to specify here that in much of this work the term "women" refers to white heterosexual women. This does not completely invalidate it, but limits its applicability. Kate, however, belongs to the group for which it does have explanatory value.

Julianne Fleenor has defined the female Gothic as:

essentially formless, except as a quest, it uses the traditional spatial symbolism of the ruined castle or an enclosed room to symbolize both the culture and the heroine; as a psychological form it provokes various feelings of terror, anger, awe, and sometimes self-fear and self-disgust directed towards the female role, female sexuality, female physiology, and procreation; and it frequently uses a narrative form which questions the validity of the

narration itself. It reflects a patriarchal paradigm that women are motherless yet fathered and that women are defective because they are not males.

[1983:15]

Two novels which have been claimed as part of a female Gothic tradition, and which Kate cites amongst those which have been important to her, are Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre. Kate's interest in these books is generalised into a fascination with the Brontes' life stories. Both the novels and the biographies are, for Kate, stories of motherlessness and childhoods which were in various ways deprived.

In Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte created a novel of development with a heroine who despite being small and plain eventually triumphed over circumstances and married her hero. In these terms, the novel has been compared to the Cinderella story: "The smallest, weakest, plainest child in the house, she embarks on her pilgrim's progress as a sullen Cinderella" [Gilbert & Gubar 1979:342].

Jane, like Kate, is an unwanted child in a home to which she does not belong. Orphaned and moneyless, she is at the mercy of others. Nevertheless, she sees herself as superior to those of whom she is the victim. Both Jane and Kate lack the attributes which would have made them attractive to their surrogate families: "There was nothing very unusual, I wasn't, I never counted myself an attrac-

tive child. There was nothing very, well I don't think so, nothing very attractive or outgoing about me" [A1:9:12-15].

In the manuscript this description changes slightly, as the child's resemblance to her mother is stressed, but the smallness, seriousness and helplessness remain:

The grey eyes looked earnestly at the older woman. The auburn hair with its ribbon highlighted the pale skin which made Lucy think how like her sister the little girl was. [M:2]

Lucy Marlow stood and watched the small waving figure disappear from sight. [M:5]

The little girl's grey eyes looked pleadingly at her... [M:10]

Both Jane and Kate are forced to make their own way in the world, and both have to undergo a lengthy learning process before attaining self-knowledge. Both receive kindness from female teachers and meet a variety of role models whom they have to reject to find their own way of being. Relationships with women are integral to the development of their self-definition. Both find men who try to turn them into a sexual object, a process which they resist in order to retain their integrity.

In Jane's character, anger and sexuality continually threaten to break through the calm exterior. Rosemary Jackson [1981] argues that Charlotte Bronte uses Gothic

episodes, such as the appearances of the mad Bertha Mason, to express moments of desire, which can then be repressed. The gothic deals with "structures of the mind which are compounded with repression" [Punter 1980:409]. It has also provided women writers with the means to deal with sexual threats. In the light of Kate's remarks about her "suppression" it is possible to argue that she is using a similar tactic, submerging both her sexuality and her anger in Gothic motifs: "I probably could never give you see, because of the suppression. This is what suppression does to you - it stays with you all your life if you've had a childhood like that" [A1:9:20-23].

There are important differences between Kate and Jane, however, which make it impossible to see the novel's attraction solely in terms of similarity with the heroine. These differences, between heroine and reader, are even more marked between Kate and Catherine, the heroine of Wuthering Heights. As Syndy McMillan Conger [1983] points out, Catherine is an unusual Gothic heroine because of the complexity of her character [Conger 1983]. She is a reworked heroine who has traded innocence for passion. So in Jane's rebellion and Cathy's passion there are complementary attitudes which Kate sees herself as lacking and which she can momentarily gain by identifying with a heroine who is unlike herself. This vicarious satisfaction balances the pleasure of validation obtained from identifying with those aspects of the heroine which are similar to herself.

Cathy's "spirit" [A1:21:6] or passion is what removes her from the bounds of the contemporary feminine ideal. Her figure points to the difficulties women had in writing within the romantic sensibility: "The Romantic writers' preoccupation with individualism, self-expression, and a soaring freedom of the spirit did not accord with the social and psychological situations of most women" [Pykett 1989:19]. Cathy's striving for freedom is therefore set against a backdrop of restriction, both spiritual and physical, and the domestic is an important sphere of action.

Kate tends, however, to confuse Charlotte and Emily Bronte, referring to Charlotte as the author of Wuthering Heights. The writers and heroines tend to merge into her idea of what the Brontes' lives were like: "one of my favourites [is] Wuthering Heights. There you've got Cathy's spirit and the way which I think was how the Brontes, how Charlotte Bronte lived. I think that had very much to do with her own life" [A1:21:5-9]. Bronte mythology is important for many readers: "The 'wild, strange facts' of the Bronte lives and the bleak location of their life-long home on the rugged Yorkshire moors have contributed a certain mystique to the Bronte story" [Nestor 1987:1].

Whilst differences of class exist between Kate and the Brontes, the latter were not wealthy and housework was often arduous. This and their motherlessness form the main

points of identification for Kate, and the fact that, despite these hardships, they survived to become important novelists is not insignificant.

Having considered the novels which provided Kate with models of the female Gothic, it is necessary next to determine how far the manuscript of her own story can be considered a Gothic text. Elizabeth MacAndrew points to the origins of the Gothic novel in eighteenth century speculation on psychology and particularly on the nature of evil. The family was chosen as the place to explore these possibilities: "Thus... the problem of evil is... presented as a psychological problem created in the ambience of the family" [1979:12]. Kate's novel springs from a similar impulse and deals with evil in similar terms; the warping of familial relationships.

The Gothic novel's original purpose was also like the "novel of sentiment" from which it derived, that is "to educate the reader's feelings through his identification with the feelings of the characters" [MacAndrew 1979:3]. Kate also has an instructional purpose in her writing, hoping that, if it were published, her novel would educate public opinion on the subject of child abuse. Her choice of the Gothic as a vehicle through which to discuss a "taboo" topic corresponds with the history of the genre [Punter 1980].

Apart from purpose and intent, Kate's writing contains a

number of Gothic elements and themes. Firstly, there is the depiction of the heroine herself:

As early as the 1790s Ann Radcliffe firmly set the Gothic in one of the ways it would go ever after: a novel in which the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine. [Moers 1977:91]

Kate's powerlessness is established in the first scene of the novel, where she is shown playing in a garden, while her fate is being decided by others inside the house. While she is younger than the traditional Gothic heroine, her youth adds to her innocence. From this point on she is alternately portrayed as cast down by circumstance or bravely taking on her future.

In her motherlessness Kate shares a further attribute of the Gothic heroine. Tania Modleski [1984] characterises the Gothic novel as a way in which women writers and readers can work through their family dramas. She cites Patricia Meyer Spacks' argument that before the twentieth century women writers frequently dealt with feelings of anger against their mothers by eliminating mother-characters from their novels. They were then able to create surrogate mothers, like Mrs. Reed in Jane Eyre, against whom bad feelings could be safely directed.

For Kate, however, the death of her mother was a real event, not a literary device. Nevertheless, it is possibly still true that feelings about being mothered, or lack of

mothering, are more easily expressed in terms of a mother-substitute. Kate has thus been able to retain the memory of her mother untainted by such ambivalence: "this person that looked after me, no I looked after myself really [A1:11:22-23]; "Tears filled her eyes She whispered "Oh Mama" why did you leave me? we were so happy together" [M:3a].

Kate also portrays the dichotomy between good and evil through the contrast between the countryside and the city. By setting her first scene in a rural garden, Kate uses nature to symbolise the happiness and innocence which are disrupted by the beginning of the story, the journey into the slums of Salford. This is the garden as metaphor for a lost state of innocence, the Eden of children's literature [Carpenter 1985]. In Kate's story it also functions as a metaphor for her relationship with her mother, whose death is the loss which begins the narrative. Carpenter notes the quasi-religious nature of the garden metaphor and in the interview, Kate uses the metaphor to describe her later situation in Biblical terms, recalling the parable of the seeds: "So I was left like something trying to grow in a garden of weeds and the weeds were choking it all the time" [A1:19:27-20:1]. Here the original garden has been corrupted and spoilt by the "weeds" which threaten to engulf Kate.

In the story, however, even in the peace of the country the inside of the house represents danger, since it is

there where her future is decided. Both the designation of a particular house as evil, and the imagery of confined spaces, common in female Gothic texts, are present throughout the manuscript:

row upon row of grimy little terraced houses [M:5]

Childishly the little girl wanted to go back with him to Cousin Joans but it was no use she would have to live in this house now. [M:7-8]

Pem had gone back inside the house leaving Kate standing on the doorstep trembling [M:10]

The child obeyed and went upstairs, the room wasn't hard to find although the landing was very dark as she entered the bedroom the unpleasant smell was overpowering [M:13]

This kind of "enclosed" imagery is consistent with Kate's perception of herself as having been "suppressed"; a word which suggests confinement, limitation and smothering.

Many Gothic novels contained some kind of monster figure. In Kate's story there is Billy, the disfigured and disabled son of Gran Watkins, whose injuries were reputedly the result of a failed abortion attempt. In the manuscript, all the sympathy expressed in the interview is erased, and her description of this man's appearance is an example of Ellen Moers definition of monsters as "creatures who scare because they look different, wrong, non-human" [1977:101]:

he was a youth about nineteen to twenty years of age, one arm hung limply by his side, he seemed to

drag one of his legs as if it were useless but worst of all his face was so frightening his mouth hung loosely he had three rows of jumbled teeth the eyes were weak and red looking, he shouted and his voice sounded awful. [M:9]

On finding the girl sitting alone in a rocking chair, Billy demands a kiss, sending her screaming out of the house. This leads us to the central dilemma of the Gothic heroine. Precisely where does the danger lie and who can be trusted? These are questions to which the child Kate has to find the answers, with no information other than her own intuition and experience. The uncertainty and powerlessness felt by the heroine is shared by the reader who is brought to a lurking sense of danger, a fear which is not explained:

Suddenly footsteps sounded in the lobby. Steps that were strange not like ordinary feet. [M:9]

looking at the old man lying in the bed propped up with pillows the little girl could only think how soon she could get out of the bedroom, not knowing why she was so frightened [M:13]

suddenly footsteps could be heard on the stairs then moving steadily across the darkened landing holding her breath Kate wondered where they would stop [M:16]

It must have been nearly morning when the little girl suddenly awoke something seemed to be running all over her small body. What was it? the child was

wide awake now sitting bolt upright in bed. whatever it was that was bothering her was under the bed-clothes she was too terrified to pull them back [M:16]

This last incident refers to the discovery of bedbugs which cover Kate's body with ugly red sores. These marks provide the outlet for the feelings of self-disgust which Fleenor notes. The feelings of shame attached to her body after her forced initiation into heterosexuality become displaced onto the sores left by the bugs:

Kate's arms and legs were covered in big red blotches. looking at them in horror Kate whispered "Oh Mama" look at me what's going to happen to me. then an awful thought passed through her childish mind, What would people think when they saw the bites Kate felt so ashamed. [M:19]

There are a number of senses, however, in which Kate's story departs from Gothic convention. There is no dramatic rescue or happy ending. Being a closely autobiographical novel, this option is not available, since Kate's life has neither ended nor, until recent years, been particularly happy. The narrative structure, too, is ungothic in its simplicity. Kate has opted for a relatively straightforward chronological mode, closer to autobiography than the convolutions of the gothic style.

The most significant difference lies in the naming of

evil. Traditional gothic terrors were shadowy, elusive and unnamed, like the threat of the beast in a fairy tale. Kate names both the danger, child abuse, and the perpetrator, Mr. Watkins. This transformation of the genre has been made possible by more recent discourses on child abuse:

What the sexual abuse crisis of the 1980s has forced us to confront is that the perpetrators aren't dangerous strangers, lunatics exiled from settled communities. They're the men we all know, not so much outcasts as the men in our lives, respectable dads, neighbours, stockbrokers and shop stewards, judges and jurors. [Campbell 1988:5]

In her analysis of modern Gothics, Tania Modleski notes that they are a way of "giving expression to women's hostility to men while simultaneously allowing them to repudiate it" [1984:66]. This explains why they have "since the eighteenth century, proved very attractive to women writers, including avowed feminists. ...in the hands of a writer like Mary Wollstonecraft, the genre is used to explore ... conflicts in relation to a society which systematically oppresses women" [1984:83]. While she is not an "avowed feminist", Kate's text can be placed within this tradition.

iii) A Love of Dickens

Charles Dickens has been an influence on working-class writers since the 1830s when he "began to show how it was

possible to incorporate the lowest elements of society into the highest form of literature" [Vincent 1982:23]. In his turn, Dickens allowed himself to be influenced by the popular literature of the time, including fairy tales, romances and the Gothic [Hollington 1984].

The writers who acknowledged their debt to Dickens were, however, male and thus shared with him a common gender while being able to aspire to improve their material position through their writing, as Dickens had. Kate shares with Dickens neither gender nor a situation from which she may have been able to "rise". Her statement that David Copperfield was her best loved novel therefore stands in need of some explanation: "David Copperfield... I've read it dozens of times" [A1:21:10-11].

Kate's remembering of the novel now links not only to her past enjoyment of the experience of reading it, but also to her purpose in recalling her life and finding the means by which to recount and explain it. The authors at least share this central purpose: "In fulfillment of the compact I have made with myself, to reflect my mind on this paper, I again examine it, closely, and bring its secrets to the light" [Dickens 1953:663].

Jane Miller argues that women are used to the "confusions" that arise from reading stories and poems about a male "I" or "we" [1986:2]. It is a common and repeated problem for women, of which we are not always consciously aware,

particularly when absorbed in the act of reading. It is less difficult for a woman to read androgynously than it is for a man, partly through training and partly since women are the "marked" gender, men would be continuously made aware of that difference.

While, therefore, the biography described in the novel would be unavailable as a model to a working-class woman reader, certain elements of the book would be open to be shared by a woman who has similar perceptions and emotions relating to childhood. The part of the novel telling of David's childhood relates thematically to much of Kate's self-perception: "Did it perhaps identify with my childhood? I think it did... his mother died, he had a step-mother, they treated him cruelly" [A1:22:7-9].

Although the chronology of the novel is slightly confused here, the links between the stories of David and Kate are those of motherlessness and childhood labour. The downfall of both begins with the death of a pretty, adored mother, with whom they had shared an exclusive relationship (in David's case at least until the arrival of Mr. Murdstone):

and I cried, and wore myself to sleep, and awoke and cried again. When I could cry no more, I began to think; and then the oppression on my breast was heaviest, and my grief a dull pain that there was no ease for. [Dickens 1953:117]

as she got into bed her eyes caught sight of her mother's dressing gown hanging behind the door,

Tears filled her eyes she whispered "Oh Mama" Why did you leave me? we were so happy together. Kate sobbed herself to sleep, as she wondered what was going to happen in the future. [M:3a]

The deaths of their mothers precipitate the children into a lives of neglect and drudgery: "all I had to anticipate was neglect" [Dickens 1953:118]; "I looked after myself really" [A1:11:23]. The children are then powerless while adults make decisions concerning their fate. As Michael Hollington points out, in Dickens the "freshness of the child [is] contrasted with adult use of language to maintain power [1984:180]. The adults in Kate's life lacked a special language too sophisticated for childish understanding, but used instead the tactic of withdrawal. The opening scene of Kate's novel shows the child in the garden while her future is being decided in the house, while later Mrs. Watkins "got up from the table and called Aunt Mary into the scullery the little girl heard them talking quietly" [M:13].

During these times of adversity, both children retain a sense of superiority, particularly moral superiority, to those around them. They share the idea of having been born to something better than their present circumstances allow; of having been robbed of their birthright of happiness and culture. David finds his escape in books, while Kate finds hers at school. Both then gain a sense of their character being formed by adversity. They see

themselves as retaining an integrity composed of honesty, innocence and naivety, almost untouched by the knowledge of the cruelty of which people are capable. Rather than weakening or breaking them, trials and tribulations strengthened and enhanced their characters.

This notion of the child is also present in the other Dickens novels which Kate mentions. Contrasts are drawn between the child Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop and the young Nicholas and Kate Nickleby and those adults who persecute them:

The face of the old man was stern, hard-featured and forbidding; that of the young one, open, handsome, and ingenuous. The old man's eye was keen with the twinklings of avarice and cunning; the young man's bright with the light of intelligence and spirit. His figure was somewhat slight, but manly and well-formed; and apart from all the grace of youth and comeliness, there was an emanation from the warm young heart in his look and bearing which kept the old man down. [Dickens 1923:23]

As in Kate's case, Nell's loneliness and piety are stressed, and her life is described as a pilgrimage: "I... pictured to myself the child in her bed: alone, unwatched, uncared for (save by the angels), yet sleeping peacefully" [Dickens 1972:55]. Similarity in appearance to a dead parent is stressed in descriptions of Nell and Lucie Manette, childlike heroine of A Tale of Two Cities.

The worlds surrounding Nell and the Nicklebys are full of grotesque and evil characters. Quilp's threat to Nell is partly sexual: he "leers" at her and suggests she become the next Mrs. Quilp. The dangers in which Kate Nickleby and Madeline Bray find themselves are also threats to their virtue, from which they must be rescued. When under the compulsion to gamble, Nell's grandfather's changed countenance is described as "a monstrous distortion of his image" [Dickens 1972:303]. At Dotheboys Hall, ugliness is used to denote not only evil, but the results of evil:

there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their off-spring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. [1923:83]

Both hero and heroine maintain their integrity, and struggle through to reward, although Nell's reward, like the unfortunate Smike's, lies in Heaven. There is also a sense in which these rewards are really fortunes restored, a restitution of what the hero or heroine was born to and had been denied by fortune or the evil or foolish deeds of others. This would accord with Kate's sense of having been born to better things, of having been denied her birth-right.

Kate draws a parallel here between Dickensian heroes and Alexandre Dumas' The Count of Monte Cristo:

See there you are again... the, well not so much the child, but in The Count of Monte Cristo there was a young man you see, blamed for what he didn't do, put in prison, but there again came the... revelation.

[A1:23:9-13]

Bridget Fowler uses a theory of Antonio Gramsci to account for the popularity of this kind of novel:

the readers are "intoxicated" by the main characters' decisive intervention to restore belief in a justice which people suspected no longer existed. Since everyone has some experience of injustice, petty or great, this creates a fertile soil for such a novel's success. [1991:31]

The use of the figure of a child or young person to embody ideas of innocence, sensibility, naturalness and piety grew out of the "romantic revival" and particularly the influence of Rousseau. The child could then also be used as a repository for adult senses of "insecurity and isolation, fear and bewilderment, vulnerability and potential violation" [Coveney 1957:xii]. In Dickens these ideas are used in a specific way:

The drama of his work lies so frequently within the theme of the oppressor and the oppressed. His own childhood, and the fate of so many children of his time, were the symbols of the crimes perpetrated by a harsh society upon its victims; and the significant area of those crimes lay within their victims' inmost feelings. [Coveney 1957:72]

Kate's writing can therefore be seen as part of a tradition of writing about children and, like Dickens, she uses her own childhood to stand in for the sufferings of others.

Dickens and Kate also share their use of the Gothic, and the influence of Charlotte Bronte's work on Dickens has been noted [Nestor 1987]. Rosemary Jackson points to this strand of Dickens' work which, while not so pronounced as in Kate's writing, is used to "allow a breakthrough of excess which then has to be recuperated as the narrative reformulates laws against transgressions" [1981:130]. Thus Uriah Heap's avarice and vengefulness, and Rosa Dartle's passion, must be punished.

The influence of Dickens, and particularly his use of the comic grotesque, can be traced in Kate's introduction of Aunt Mary:

They were just about finished tea when an old lady walked into the kitchen. she was dressed in a long full black skirt. a black Bodice and a long woollen (hug me tight) which was really a woollen coat. Black button up boots and stockings "Oh but the hat she was wearing it was all covered in flowers lace and feathers which bobbed around the old lady's face because they were falling off the hat which was tilted to one side making it look very funny. Kate smiled for the first time that day [M:12-13]

Dickens has David Copperfield's life take a different turn, however, when he travels to Dover in search of his Aunt Betsey. For Hollington [1984] this journey symbolises the death and rebirth of David, who is pushed to his physical and mental limits to emerge re-named Trotwood and placed in a very different relation to the world. At this point Trotwood and Kate part company, since it would not be possible for a woman to undergo the experiences of the second part of the novel; a successful career, courtship and marriage to a "childbride", widowhood, becoming a professional author and finally returning to his "good angel", Agnes.

This progression leads us to the central problem of a gendered reading of the second part of the novel: for a woman reader to identify with Trotwood is to abandon her gender, while to identify with Agnes is to abandon her self, since Agnes has no character but exists only as a model of "feminine service" [Swindells 1985]. Jane Miller [1986] points out that women writers may use male characters to express repressed or socially unacceptable elements of their selves or their aspirations. A similar process may take place during reading.

Autobiographical writing, however, cannot use such strategies. Autobiography as a record of progress is not generally a reflection of women's life experiences and so is not available to them. Women writers are left needing other models:

What working women autobiographers have to do therefore, given that absence of routes, is to construct subjectivities by calling on particular representations, particular genres, in which women are at least visible, though frequently in a reified, idealised form. [Swindells 1985:140]

The moment of David's escape from the Gothic therefore becomes the moment of Kate's descent into it.

IV Work in Progress

It is important to remember that Kate's novel is a work in progress. She is engaged in the work of trying to find an appropriate form and language in which to tell her story. This involves two major issues for her. The first of these is the choice between an autobiography and a novel. Kate has two main reasons for choosing the latter. The sensitive nature of the issues she is dealing with have made Kate conscious of the need for anonymity, which she feels it would be easier to achieve in a novel. Also, as a novice writer, she believes the discipline of keeping to a fictional narrative will stop her digressing:

I might have started with "I", it would have been an autobiography. I would have started, put "I", "I", then gone on to something else. If I keep it story fashion every word will [still] be true... [A1:33:8-11]

Other advantages of autobiographical fiction over autobiography have been outlined by Valerie Sanders [1989]. A fictional form allows for greater selectivity, which Kate has exercised in her choice of events around which to structure her story. A contrived symbolic ending is available in a way in which it is not in "real life". There is also a greater stylistic freedom, which is important for Kate who uses literary devices to make the more difficult parts of her story tellable. In her introduction to her novel That's How It Was, Maureen Duffy

argues that:

The book is a novel rather than an autobiography because of its structuring towards this end [to show the contradictions in her relationship with her mother], with the consequent selection among characters and events, and the heightened language used to evoke them. If I couldn't invent facts, which I couldn't because I wanted to tell a particular truth, the art must be in the style, in a language that was colloquial, with I hope the energy of the demotic, and charged with imagery. [1983:vi]

Kate's work is similar, in that to her the most important aspect is the telling of a "particular truth", and in that the creative aspect of the narrative lies in the way it is told. Kate is aware of the difficulties involved in finding a language appropriate to her story. She attended English language classes to brush up on the technical aspects of her writing, but her main concerns are to keep the language simple and to express the point of view of the child.

[I want] to write it in simple language. P'raps that's why it appears to be choppy, because it's simple language... plus is any child academically, you know, at first? Are they? Well we're all children, we all have to learn to talk properly and what have you. [A1:34:13-18]

The issue of "choppiness" is a preoccupation of Kate's

during the interview, since this was the criticism made of her writing at the session of the writers' group I had attended. The woman who made this criticism put her finger on the difficulty in finding a consistent language for experiences outside the mainstream of literature.

In his discussion of Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole (the importance of which Kate acknowledges) and its reception by historians and literary critics, Roger Webster addresses the criticism levelled against Greenwood, that his choice of the novelistic form and a literary language for the authorial voice represent a collusion with the bourgeoisie. The modern realist novel is felt to represent the highest point of the development of bourgeois culture, and there is therefore an argument that while the novel spoke for the emerging bourgeois consciousness, a new form is required to express proletarian consciousness. Webster argues that rather than this being the case, the fractures in the text question its realism:

Running through the novel is a vein of inflated diction and literary allusion which appears singularly inappropriate to a novel embodying working-class consciousness; it produces a self-conscious literariness which might be more appropriate to a modernist text. [1984:53]

This problem is embodied in the hero, Harry, who speaks in dialect and thinks in literary language.

A similar set of difficulties arise in writing for/of children. The "impossibility of children's literature" is explored by Jaqueline Rose [1984]. In discussing the reasons why Enid Blyton is loved by children and derided by critics of children's literature, she points out that the way in which Blyton as author alternates between the voice of an adult and that of a child character breaks the rule that the narrator should stay consistently on one side of the adult/child divide. To take up alternating positions is seen as a breakdown in the adult identity represented by stability in language. In this sense, Kate is guilty of too close an identification with the child in her writing.

These linguistic difficulties have beset many of those trying to write of experiences outside those conventionally given form in the novel. It is not surprising that Kate, too, is still struggling with them.

Notes

1) Both Stephen Humphries [1981] and Elizabeth Roberts [1984] demonstrate the unpopularity of schooling amongst working-class children.

2) See for example Janet Sayers [1986] and Jaqueline Rose [1986].

3) See Janet Ford and Ruth Sinclair [1987] and Margo Jeffreys [1989] for a discussion of the difficulties older women face.

The little girl playing on the spacious lawn of her cousin's house could not have been remotely aware of the changes that were to take place in her young life. This was one concession the child would know for a long time.

Lucy Marlow looked through the kitchen windows at her niece, she had taken her sister's death very hard. Amy Kate's mother and herself had been very close. now as she looked at the motherless little girl, her heart ached at the thought of what her young life would be like in the surroundings she was being forced to accept and the people who would care for her, Lucy had a very good idea of what that care would amount to.

Her daughter Dora joined her in the pleasant kitchen, looking at her mother the young woman sought to reason with her.

"Now look Mum, it's no use you worrying about Kate. The matter's settled she has to go and live with Gilbert's wife in Salford there's isn't any alternative, she can't stay here. if she was older well that would be a different matter altogether."

"But couldn't we try and sort something out? love?" No! Dora's voice was sharp. "I've decided to make a clean break of it & she goes to Salford on Monday."

"I've arranged for Bill Martin to pick her up early I'll pack her belongings myself this evening."

Seeing her mother's unhappy face Dora spoke again. "It'll be alright you'll see Kate will settle down in no time. She'll have to the young woman thought not voicing her thoughts."

she said "I should have a word with her Mum preper her for what's going to happen you can do it much better than I can. So thought Lucy Dore has put the responsibility squarely on my shoulders, and she dreaded the ordeal that was facing her.

As Kate spotted her Aunt Lucy coming across the lawn she ran to meet her "Hello Aunt Lucy I'm glad you've come. The grey eyes looked earnestly at the older woman. The auburn hair with its utter highlighted the pale skin which made Lucy think how like her sister the little girl was. Amy Dunne had been beautiful had been voted the prettiest girl in Cheshire when she was twenty one, Lucy's Marlow's eyes filled with tears as she thought of the brief illness that had claimed her sister's life, a bout of Influenza turning to pneumonia and she was gone in a week, leaving her little daughter motherless.

"Why are you looking so sad 'Auntie' Kate had noticed Lucy's sadness. Looking at the child the older woman said "Come and sit down beside me on the tree seat, I want to talk to you.

Pulling her doll's pram behind her Kate sat down beside her Aunt.

Now Kate what I'm going to say to you I don't want to say. but there is no other way. It will not be possible for you to live here any longer arrangements have been made for you to go to Balford to live with Pam and her mother, at those words the child's grey eyes filled with tears "Oh No Auntie, not there I don't want to go and live there, I don't like the house don't let me go there I'll be a very good girl here I promise if I can stay here.

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I'm sorry love there's nothing I can do. Just listen, dear. You'll settle down. You see I know you will.

The words belied Lucy's thoughts and she wished with all her heart, that she could keep the little girl here. What could she do? Jim her husband could not afford to keep another child. They had two of their own still at home, of course there was a little money attached to Kate a small weekly sum coming weekly from her father. She had talked to Jim about the situation and he was adamant Kate could not live with them.

Lucy tried to comfort the sobbing child and eventually the tears stopped.

Kate looked at her Aunt, Lucy was very much like her mother the same pretty face and grey eyes but the curly hair was going grey.

When do I have to go? Monday Lucy replied, Bill Carter will come and fetch you on Monday morning.

Will you help me to pack those my clothes and dolls, Of course I will love me will do it tomorrow. Now come and have your dinner. Then we will go to my house. this afternoon.

Kate seemed to have calmed down now although the tears and heartbreak shined in the childish eyes.

Going to bed that night in the little bedroom she had shared with her beloved 'Mama' and looking around at the pretty curtains and furnishings and there was something else that she could see through the window, there were trees and flowers in the gardens of the other house. In a short time there would be another room in another house. She was sure it would be ugly. Would she ever see this house again.

as she got into bed, her eyes caught sight of her mother's dressing gown hanging behind the door, tears filled her eyes she whispered 'Oh Mama! Why did you leave me? we were so happy together.' Kate sobbed herself to sleep, as she wondered what was going to happen to her in the future.

In her last day at Cousin Doris's, Kate helped to pack her belongings, her misery grew as the day wore on the only thought that filled her mind was that she didn't want to go and live in Salford.

At seven thirty the little girl had her bath in the nice bathroom then sitting in the pleasant kitchen she had her supper and went to bed. at the foot of the bed stood the old suitcase and a box containing her toys now tomorrow she would be leaving this house for ever.

Come on Kate Time to get up hurry up and get dressed 'Bill' will be calling for you at ten o'clock, Joan Dean's voice sounded hurried and impatient. The little girl was soon dressed in a simple cotton frock, black shoes, and white socks. when it came to doing her hair she found that she couldn't fix her ribbon like 'Mama' could it kept slipping off her hair perhaps Cousin Joan would fix it for her.

Slowly walking downstairs and going into the kitchen Kate found her breakfast ready, there was Toast a boiled egg and a glass of milk.

Through the window she saw Aunt Lucy coming to see her off.

As the older woman entered the kitchen she kissed Kate on the cheek and said slow core you this morning Well. thought Kate how am I suppose to feel I don't want to go anyway but I can't do anything about it. she looked at Lucy and said miserably "I'm alright Auntie. Will you tie my ribbon in my hair for me please."

There's a good girl everything will be alright you will see. love Kate's childish eyes looked earnestly at her Aunt Will you come and see me in Salford please. and will Grandma Moones come to? Off course we will just as soon as you get settled down.

Now you'll have to hurry, Bill will be here in a few minutes and we mustn't keep him waiting must we.

A few minutes later the sound of a lorry could be heard at the bottom of the drive, a forlorn little girl holding Lucy Marlow's hand emerged from the house. They walked slowly down the drive as if to prolong the journey to the lorry, Bill Carter carried the old suitcase and the cardboard box containing Kate's toys. These were duly placed on the old lorry. An old piece of matting was spread on the dusty boards for Kate to sit on, clinging to her Aunt's hand as long as she possibly could, as if she didn't want to ever let go, only relinquishing her grasp when Bill lifted her on to the lorry. "Now sit there little un and hold tight he said as he climbed into the cab. The lorry moved and gathered speed, Lucy Marlow stood and watched the small wavery figure disappear from sight.

She went feeling guilty to her sister's memory. "Please forgive me Amy she whispered and she turned and went slowly back into her daughter's house.

The leafy Cheshire countryside gave way to the main city road to Salford, as the lorry rumbled past city streets with row upon row of grimy little terraced houses, haystack mills and warehouse houses that stood like Giants on the landscape. There were shops public houses, on and on until they came to a big bridge Kate had seen this big bridge before it had reminded her of a meccanum set built on a road. It moved slowly round to a different angle, allowing a large ship pass under the iron girders, on its way down the canal its bows made fountains of water as the ship moved slowly

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until it was free from the bridge, shooting sounds came from a big black and white funnell soon the bridge had seen yet another big ship pass under its portals and returned to its normal position.

The traffic streamed forward after its enforced stoppage, including Bill's lorry.

The lorry rumbled on. Suddenly it turned into one of the little streets that abounded in the area, a funny little shed stood at its corner. as they passed a smell of wood and oil made the little girl cough, Kate learned later that this shed was where they made firelighters which helped to make years fine burn when years were first lighting it. helping to make bright.

As Bill stopped before one of the terrace houses a few of the street children gathered round the wooden door. they looked curiously at the little girl on the lorry. whispering and pointing amongst themselves, one was eating a large Betty covered with jam. some of it had trickled all round her mouth and chin. Kate noticed the shabby clothes and worn out shoes.

Bill's voice was kind as he jumped out of his cab and came round to where she was sitting. "Come on kiddie let's have you down from there, Kate went to stand up. it was then she noticed that her shoes were stuck to the old matting & he hadn't noticed the melting tar due to the hot sun and the heat of the lorry which had got worse during the journey.

The old suitcase and cardboard box was stuck to, "I'm stuck! Bill! Kate said. What shall I do? Oh hell was the man's reply. I'm sorry kiddie catching hold of her. he tried to get her away from the gummy substance.

The children laughed, as she stood on the ground, her clothes and shoes covered in Tar, the suitcases and cardboard Box standing on the pavement.

Kate was terrified of what Ben would say. Bill shouted up the passageway of the house the door was open to the warm sunny day "Answer there Missus," in answer to his call a big elderly woman, probably in her sixties came out the dress she wore was very colorful, red edged with black braid there were black buttons all down the front, a gaily colored scarf covered her head, it was pinned back she wore a large brooch on her dress, her feet were encased in black button up boots, The little girl thought ~~the~~ the woman looked like a cypress.

"Mrs Watkins Bill asked?" "Aye that's me" was the reply. Looking at Kate the old woman said "I see yer've brought the little wench then" "ye'd better cum in then and have a cup o' tea, turning to the forlorn little girl she rasped. "What's the matter with yee Kate answered timidly "My shoes have got tar on them" Bill broken in "it aint her fault about the tar it was on the back of the lorry."

"You'd better get 'em off then" "I have yer got another pair to put on? I have got a pair of saddle in my case, but that's got tar on to, Well well better get em out then."

Bill thought this was a good time to make a move. "Er I'll not bolter with the tea if you don't mind missus, I've got to get back to work but 'Ta' all the same; looking at Kate standing in her stocking feet not knowing what to do, he said "I long kidlie praps I'll see you again good luck" he thought to himself poor little mite shall need it.

Childishly the little girl wanted to go back

with him to Cousin Joans but it was no use she would have to live in this house now.

The man departed and the gypsy like Woman took Kate into a big Kitchen, a large wooden table stood in the middle of the room. by one side of a wall there was a massive Welsh Dresser with wooden carvings, the shelves held plates cups and saucers dishes their colors of blue and white and brown looked very pretty.

On the wide flat bottom of the shelves there were glass shades containing stuffed Birds others contained china dolls. there were other things to but what caused Kate's eyes to widen was the beautiful fashioned figure of the 'Crucifixion' made in white marble fastened to a black ebony base. The little girl thought the figure was beautiful although she didn't like the stuffed birds much they seemed to stare back at her with their beady black eyes.

On the other side of the Kitchen there were big cupboards from ceiling to floor, they stood on one side of a large black leaded cooking range which contained two steel hobs a turned grate in which a small fire burned around the base of the grate was a steel polished fender and an assortment of little fire tools. The hearth was white stoned or as it was known (Donkey stoned).

Four plain wooden chairs and a rocking chair Kate liked that she remembered another one just like this one in which her 'Mama' had rocked her to sleep and nursed her when she was poorly.

In front of the range or (grate) was a pegged rug made from bits of material with a rough material as a base. The floor was covered with something called oil cloth.

"Now then my wench get your eye other

shoes. out of use case. you can't walk about in 'em
others well have 'em all over 't' place.

Unfastening the old case. Kate was pleased
to see her clothes were alright she wouldn't be in any
trouble now or get shouted at. Taking out the sandals
she put them on.

Now said Mrs Watkins, 'sit 'e' here in
this chair, the little girl asked almost in a whisper 'Can
I sit in the rocking chair please, The woman looked
at her. then said, 'Aye alright, then' 'I'm going to
't' corner shop. Ah won't be long. don't move. till I come
back.

Sitting down on the shabby cushioned Rocking
chair in which her feet hardly touched the floor. Kate
rocked to and fro. thinking of the times her mother
had rocked her at Cousin Joan's. she could almost
feel her mother's gentle arms around her.

Suddenly footsteps sounded in the lobby.
steps that were strange not like ordinary feet.
The owner of the footsteps came through the
kitchen door. He was a youth about nineteen to twenty
years of age, one arm hanging limply by his side, he
seemed to drag one of his legs as if it was useless.
but worst of all his face was so frightening his
mouth hung loosely he had three rows of sunbled
teeth the eyes were red and weak looking, he shouted
and his voice sounded awful.

'Mam Mam! Beat The Book won' 'Where
are you Mam?' catching sight of Kate he began
to laugh. it sounded awful. horrible, moving closer
to the terrified child who was frozen to the chair
with fright, questions were racing through her
mind. What was he going to do? would he hurt her?
Could she get away from him? Oh, why didn't
somebody come into the house?

There was no way to escape from this awful person. He moved closer, she wanted to scream but no sound came out. Bracing his good hand down on her small head, he lowered his face towards hers saying "Nice little girl come to live at Georgie's house little girl give ^{Billy} a big kiss as his face almost touched hers. Kate screamed and ran towards the lobby, and the open front door. The insane laughter echoing behind her.

As she reached the door she bumped into Emily but now the child was almost hysterical. What's going on here. Kate clung to her in tears. Emily noticed that one or two of the neighbours had stopped to watch.

What's going on. go on back inside the house yer making a holy show of me out here yet inside.

The little girl's green eyes looked pleadingly at her please come back inside with me. Surely she would protect her and not let the boy come near her, after all this was her brother's wife.

Would she be in trouble with the old lady for moving out of the chair ^{Pem} Emily had gone back inside the house leaving Kate standing on the doorstep trembling.

She followed after a moment or two back in the kitchen Pem asked her brother "what have you been up to" and where's Mam? Dunno the boy mumbled. a few moments later the old lady walked in, looking at Pem then at her son she said "What's up?" Oh you know what he's like for playing the fool. I was just coming through the door when this silly little fool ran screaming outside. Oh Mrs Watkins replied.

Then she started to tell Pem about Kate's arrival. Well we've had a rest to do here it came by long. her was covered in tar.

so was her clobber. I only left her for a few minutes while 'ah' went to shop. I told her not to move. I knew you got to go back to work. Pem? yes but I'll finish early. Pem replied, Kate's ^{Terror} needed at least there would be someone in the house with her. by now she began to wonder if any one would protect her at all.

I suppose you're hungry, I'll make you a butter that'll do you until tea time. "I'm not hungry" thought the child she felt to miserable. but she said. Thank you to Mrs Watkins. If she said no there might not be anything else to eat tonight. Kate had always been used to regular meals at Cousin Jones's.

Now my wench you had better learn to call me. Grandma Watkins she thought to herself. I'll soon have this kid toying the line. never fear.

The little girl looked at the old woman and shuddered. This person was nothing like her real granny Moones. she was lovely.

Pem came home early as promised. she asked Kate about the journey to Salford and she wanted to know why Joan hadn't sent her in the car. Two cars she's got there and the stuck up bitch had to send you by lorry. Give a good mind to go down there tomorrow and give her a piece of my mind. At this time a lonely unhappy little girl didn't care what anybody did anymore.

At last there was signs of a meal. Kate was asked to set the table. Billy kept coming in and out of the house. shouting something about horses winning races. this was something Kate didn't understand.

The tea was brought out of the oven. it was melt lovely and Kate was hungry. Taking a large blue enamel dish and placing it on the table this was a meal called 'Lancashire Hotpot' it consisted

of meat and potatoes onions and on the top of the dish were a lot of baked potatoes and sausages, Thick gravy ran down the sides of the large dish.

Portions of the food were ladled out onto blue and white plates, a plate of thick white bread stood on the table with a large bottle of brown sauce called 'Dadler'; there was no tablecloth adorning the table, the little girl soon learned that cloths were for special occasions only.

A wooden tray was set up with a spoon and a fork and a steaming plate of the food was put on it, two rounds of Thick white bread completed the meal.

Pem took the tray and vanished upstairs with it Kate remembered when she had visited this house once or twice with her mother that Mr Watkins was ill upstairs.

Billy came floundering in Gran asked him 'What's won the four o'clock son?' 'Dandy Lad!' the boy replied, 'That was 'T'one I was waiting for. Ah! we got a treble up turning up and got us tea then go and get me winnings from Jimmy Abbot a man who was called The Bookie he put bets from the people on horses.'

The boy sat down at the table with Gran Pem and Kate, Lancashire Slot Pat. was dished out. Kate ate hungrily for she hadn't had a meal since leaving Timperly.

Suddenly Billy burst into the same awful laughter that she had heard earlier in the day. What was the matter with him? Why did he make this awful noise? Kate was very puzzled.

They were just about finished tea when an old lady walked in to the kitchen. she was dressed in a long full black skirt, a black Bodice and a long woollen (hug me tight) which was really

woollen coat. Black button up boots and stockings
 "Oh but the hat that she was wearing it was all covered
 in flowers, lace and feathers which bobbed around the
 old lady's face because they were falling off the hat.
 which was tilted to one side making it look very funny.
 Kate smiled for the first time that day.

The strange old lady's name was Aunt Mary
 and although Kate didn't know at this time she was to prove
 a good friend.

"Want a bit o tea Mary, Gran inquired, "Ah
 Bejabeers No Tanks Pally Aie had mi tay at Nellie's
 or gran's name was Polly, it reminded Kate of her own
 Auntie Polly her mama's eldest sister.

Aunt Mary looked at Kate and said "Aie
 see you've got the little girl Faith when did she arrive
 Gran filled her in with all the details, then she got
 up from the table and called Aunt Mary into the scullery
 the little girl heard them talking quietly, and then
 Mary's Irish voice as she came back into the kitchen "Ah
 Faith Pally aie dont mind at all. The Child can sleep
 with me. Kate heard this conversation because she was still
 sat at the table Mama had always told her never to
 leave the table unless told to.

Pam turned to her small sister in deep
 remembrance "Are yer going to sit there all day?
 Go upstairs and fetch the tray down 'Dads' in the side
 room, The child obeyed and went upstairs, the room
 wasn't hard to find although the landing was very
 dark. as she entered the bedroom the unpleasant smell
 was overpowering, looking at the old man lying
 in the bed propped up with pillows the little girl
 could only think how soon she could get out of
 the bedroom, not knowing why she was so
 frightened.

"Gee come for the tray" Ah never mind that

come and sit here on the bed. seeing that Kate was hesitant he said "Come on I won't hurt you." The frightened child moved towards the bed, sitting as far away as he could.

The old man raised himself from the pillows Kate drew back, what happened next terrified the child pulling back the bed clothes exposing his lower body. he grabbed the small hand placing it between his groin, holding it firm despite her struggles to free it. "let me go Kate sobbed please let me go." he released her laying back on the pillows "It's no use saying anything you know they won't believe you."

Grabbing the tray Kate fled downstairs, noticing her tears Gran Watkins said "What's the matter wench? The frightened child hung her head and replied "Nothing!"

After she had helped to wash up, Pem said "I'll show you where you're going to sleep" at the mention of going upstairs after what happened in the old man's bedroom made her cringe. Questions raced across her mind "Would she be safe upstairs? What other terrors were lurking up there?" Looking at Pem she wanted to tell her what happened, but somehow Kate knew she would not be believed.

That first night at Gran Watkins was one Kate never forgot. After her supper consisting of a mug of cocoa and a piece of bread and butter she was told to have a wash in the scullery. Now this was like an outhouse it contained a large brown sink or slopstone as it was called in one corner stood a big copper with a fire grate built in and in which washing was done, a nickety table and a funny looking thing called a 'Mangel' some shelves were fitted around the walls these contained pots and pans. The floor was stone like the church floor in Timperley.

Turning the tap on the only one there was, there being no hot water except it was boiled in the kettle.

Washing her face and neck refreshed Kate tho she couldn't help comparing this old stone scullery with the nice bathroom at Cousin Joan's.

"Shurry up Pem shouted I want to see you in bed before I go out, Kate hurriedly dried her face and hands and went back into the kitchen, I'm ready now the child said timidly, Cum' on. then I'll take you up. Joan wasn't there only Billy rocking himself in the old rocking chair.

Reaching the darkened landing Pem led the way to the front room. which was a little way from that other bedroom.

It was very sparsely furnished the front room all it contained was, an old Wardrobe, three old beds, a wash hand stand with a jug and Basin and an old chest of drawers, The floor was covered with shabby oilcloth, and a tattered rug both front Window were heavily curtained.

Well you can get yourself into bed you'll be alright Kate nodded, There was no goodnight kiss before Pem left the room, Oh how she wished her Mam was here. she had nearly always read her a story before she tucked her little daughter up for the night and 'Mama always kissed her goodnight.

Undressing quickly Kate shivered as she stood on the chilly oilcloth looking at her feet which were bare she realised she had forgotten her slippers for a moment forgetting where she was there was almost a call for 'Mama'

Another thing that had to be done was to fasten the bedroom door. Kate remembered seeing two dark looking men coming up the steps who were they the child wondered.

It was a nickety door with a worn out bolt. but after bit of a struggle she managed to fasten it. then it would have to be opened if any one came into the bedroom - go to bed, Kate remembered the snatches of conversation she had heard between Gran and Aunt Mary and this must be the old woman's bed.

Her prayers said, there was a minute before he got into bed to glance through the window next the bed. The gas lamps were being lit, The lamplighter - man with a tall stick carrying a flint at the top of it, was lighting each gas lamp. as he touched each - as mantle a blue glow which within seconds turned to a golden gleam shone along the street like the gleam of golden droplets on the cobbles.

The drab houses were bathed in a warm glow of golden shadows for just a few short hours until dawn covered the sky.

At last she got into bed it was cold on the oil cloth and her feet were like ice, pulling the scanty bed clothes up to her chin she lay there listening to the creaks of the house, and the street outside the lamps through shadows on the walls, occasionally a voice could be heard outside singing or talking as people went home from the pictures or the public houses.

Suddenly footsteps could be heard on the stairs then moving stealthily across the darkened landing holding her breath Kate wondered where they would stop, but they continued up towards the attic regions.

A few minutes later slow shuffling sound came into the bedroom, leaning over the bed Aunt Mary whispered Are you asleep Kate? Here's a bit of chocolate eat it afore Polly comes up to bed.

The old lady started to get undressed.

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placing her clothes neatly on an old box by the other side of the bed, before she reached the last of her clothes she had on a funny looking garment which looked like shoelaces at the back at the front there were steel hooks which she undid as she removed the garment. She rubbed her stout body from side to side as if in relief. Kate learned later that this funny looking clothing was called a corset.

Sitting on the edge of the bed the old woman unpinned her hair and brushed it for what seemed a long time. This completed Aunt Mary got into bed. in the process Kate nearly got tipped out on the other side, only managing to roll back in time.

Grossing the child's cold feet she said "Ah Faith the feet are cold. I'll wrap them in this little woollen shawl. This gesture was to keep Kate's feet warm through many a cold winter's night in the future.

Gradually the events of that first day began to take over a lonely little girl was very tired soon blessed sleep helped to ease away the incidents of that first day but before she slept Kate whispered "Good Night. God bless Mama!"

It must have been nearly morning when the little-girl suddenly awoke something seemed to be running all over the small body. What was it? The child was wide awake now and sitting bolt upright in bed. whatever it was that was bothering her was under the bed clothes she was too terrified to pull them back, in case of what she found.

Aunt Mary stirred Kate said "There's something running on my legs and arms. I don't know what it is and I'm frightened."

Lighting the candle. the woman pulled back the bedding to expose several dull red creatures

Kate looked at them with horror, & she had never seen anything like this before.

"Oill soon get rid of those little varmin the old woman said, as she opened a drawer, taking out a bar of carbolic soap which she used to slap down the ugly red bugs for that is what they were. They don't like the light so ill be leaving the candle burning. so yee try and get back to sleep again they won't come back again she said trying to reassure the child.

Kate wondered where did those nasty things come from? how did they get into the bed? and would they return? Burying her head in the rough pillow she started to cry. she wondered how she was going to live in this awful house.

Finally sleep came, shutting out for a few hours all the unhappy child's miseries.

The bugs bit hard that night but Kate was too tired to feel anything.

The sun shining through the bedroom windows woke Aunt Mary and the child who opened her eyes sleepily. It was a few minutes before she realised where she was. There was a ~~fenny~~ funny noise coming from the other side of the room. Somebody was snoring just like a porky pig and it was coming from Gran's direction. She was lay on her back on the other bed. her mouth was wide open. her grey hair was covered with a scarf, her face flushed and damp. her large nose moved with each snore. This was not a very pretty sight.

Glancing at the other bed. and seeing it empty the blue nightdress still being folded up on the pillow Kate wondered if Penn had already gone to work.

she moved to get out of bed and it was then that the 'buggies' night's work was revealed. Kate's arms legs and neck were covered in big red blotches looking at them in horror. Kate whispered 'Oh Mama! look at me what's going to happen to me' then an awful thought passed through her childish mind, what would people think when they see the bites Kate felt so ashamed.

Chapter 5: "Trying to Write Myself"

I Childhood

In her discussion of the "impossibility" of children's fiction, Jacqueline Rose [1984] argues that "growing up " consists of finding a place in both language and life. This place is not, however, found by chance; the pathway that takes us on this journey is circumscribed by gender, class, ethnicity and indeed by language itself. For a woman, one of the ways in which this passage is made possible is through reading. For a girl or young woman, books and magazines written "for women" provide a map of the route into "proper" femininity, while speaking to and assuaging the emotions generated by the process itself.

In many ways Marilyn followed the same path as other working-class girls of her generation. Born in 1959 and educated at a secondary modern school, she has been married and divorced, and has worked as a barmaid, a waitress, a go-go dancer, and at a variety of clerical jobs before having to give up work because of mental health problems. Her reading history is in many ways typical, taking her through fairy stories, Enid Blyton, Bunty, Jackie, Woman, Woman's Own and romantic fiction. Her progress along this path was not, however, without its problems, and so it is possible, through an interrogation of the transcript of our interview and her writing, to examine both the transitions of an "ordinary" female life-

cycle and the psychological stresses they cause.

As a child Marilyn was an "avid reader" [A2:53:17]. She enjoyed fairy stories, remembering in particular Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood, but named as her favourite book, "one of those books that's stayed with me" [A2:54:12], Enid Blyton's The Land of the Faraway Tree. In the 1970s, a debate raged over Blyton's work, concerning both its value as "literature" and the difficulties it presents to those involved in anti-sexist, anti-racist childcare and education. Positions are taken up in this debate depending largely on the perspective the writer takes on "children's literature".

The classic liberal-humanist perspective on what is happening in children's literature is demonstrated by the publication Growing Up Through Books from the Schools Council [Jackson 1984] "The Child" is referred to throughout as "he" and no attempt is made to relate children to their social backgrounds. "Literature" is praised for its use in socialising the child. The claim is made that "imaginative fiction plays an important part in the growth of ... individuation and in this sense of relatedness [of child and society]" [1984:6]. Thus "good" literature for children introduces them to the values of the wider society, engaging their interest and sympathy in a way that direct teaching cannot. Furthermore it "helps give [the child] an awareness of his place in time and space; it helps give him sympathetic understanding and an

awareness of others in society" [1984:6]. In other, and less glowing terms, it performs an ideological function, particularly in the way in which it introduces the child to the supposed "naturalness" of social relations. This is done in part by referring to "society" as an abstract ideal, removed from any concept of social divisions.

The kind of social analysis missing from liberal-humanism is precisely that which informs a growing body of criticism taking an anti-racist and/or anti-sexist stance. Bob Dixon [1978] and Rosemary Stones [1983] analyse the stereotypical images that abound in many children's books. In this type of criticism the role of children's literature in the socialisation of children is problematised. Stones argues that "books help to define acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for females and males, the options there are in society and to which sex they are available" [1983:8].

Literature for children, therefore, both "good" and "bad", is seen not only as widening their horizons, but also as determining the range and focus of their vision. The simple linear path of development is split, and children assigned routes according to their gender and ethnicity. Stones' paper cites many examples of research from Australia, Britain and the USA which purports to show the measurable effect of racism and sexism in reading materials on self-esteem, attitudes and behaviour. What it does not consider, however, is what else is happening in these

stories. Whilst not denying the damaging effects of racist and sexist stereotypes, it is necessary to consider why certain stories are so popular with children; why it is that they give so much pleasure.

Questions of pleasure and desire are generally addressed from within psychoanalysis, and children's literature is no exception to this. Bettelheim [1976], for example, analyses fairy tales from a traditional Freudian perspective, arguing that elements of the stories speak to the crises which the child experiences, and that they aid their successful resolution. As Rose [1984] argues, however, this stress on the "educational" (in its widest sense) value of the tales is typically adult, circumventing the issue of pleasure. In her analysis of the Peter Pan story (stories), Rose argues that the major structural device of exploration and repetition indicates that the stories deal with something difficult to come to terms with. A sense of danger can be built up, then safely discharged, again and again. The sensitive issues can be looked at (but not too closely) and disarmed, "proving" that the world is a safe place. Whether this reassurance is primarily for the benefit of children or adults is open to question.

So how far do these various perspectives go in explaining the attraction of Enid Blyton's fantasy tales? The tales of the Enchanted Wood and the Faraway Tree have been neglected in the literature on Blyton, which tends to

concentrate on the Noddy series, the school stories or the "Famous Five" adventures. The fantasy element of the tales places them as relatives of the fairy tale, and this was indeed how Marilyn read them: "The Land of the Faraway Tree for me was, you know, similar to a fairy story and the best I've ever read" [A2:54:8-10]. Bob Mullan, in a sympathetic book on Blyton, points out the similarity of the Faraway Tree to Yggdrasil in Norse mythology, with the more frightening elements of the tales removed. He notes that "some commentators regarded these stories of hers as representing much of her best work" [1987:41].

Blyton is also castigated for elements of her stories which are present in many books for children. Jackson, for example, is concerned with the "unreality" of Blyton's "real" world, arguing that "we, as teachers, may be less than happy about those [books] which present a dishonest view of reality, the adult-free world of Enid Blyton, for example" [1984:3].

In the Faraway Tree stories, "Mother" is indeed a shadowy figure, asserting her authority only to keep the children indoors when it is raining and supply them with sandwiches and cakes to take on their adventures. She is, however, undoubtedly there, and in a sense holds the tales together as the return home is the necessary closure to each adventure. It can also be argued that the presence or absence of realistically depicted adults is somewhat irrelevant since the disturbing elements of adult-child

relationships can only be dealt with in terms of fantasy. Furthermore, in a Piagetian account of children's reading, Peter Tucker [1976] argues that children are concerned to find a character with which they can identify, which explains the numbers of children and animals and comparative lack of adults in these books.

Blyton's work also contains a number key themes of "good" literature for children. The relationship of the individual to the group is a prime concern and dissident children, the awful (selfish and inquisitive) cousin Connie for example, are punished and become, during the progress of the narrative, socialised into the values of the micro-cosmic society that the Family and the Tree represent.

In his analysis of the "Golden Age" of children's literature, Humphrey Carpenter [1985] suggests that the defining feature of a children's "classic" is the quasi-religious search for a "good place", an Arcadia, represented by the secret garden, the magic land etc. Many of the Lands which visit the top of the Faraway Tree conform to this model, with the addition of "wicked" or "unpleasant" Lands which form a kind of dystopia or hell.

It is easier to understand the rejection of Blyton from an anti-sexist standpoint. Each time the adventure begins to hot up the girls are sent home to their properly domesticated Mother. "'The girls mustn't come into this', said Jo..." [1989:161] Gender-marked literature for children

has, however, tended to be split into adventure stories for boys and domestic tales for girls. One reason for the appeal of the Faraway Tree for girls could be the way in which the adventurous and the domestic are mingled; the children's home being the beginning and end point of each episode, while the nature of the Tree itself as a home is emphasised. Much of the action takes place in interiors, whether in the "real" world, the Tree or the Lands which visit it. While never stepping out of their place to take a leading role, the girls are at least given some part in the adventures and occasionally allowed a good idea.

The work of Jacqueline Rose goes some way towards explaining why Blyton is simultaneously frowned upon by adults and enjoyed by children. She quotes Hildick on Blyton, who argues that "the author seems to be herself as irrational and abandoned in her irrationality as a child" [1984:66]. Blyton, it seems, breaks the Golden Rule of children's literature by refusing to consistently place herself as either adult or child; the (adult) authorial voice being frequently as "childish" as the child-characters themselves.

Rose posits that the demand for a coherent language is an adult one, based on the fallacy that this language would indicate a stable, rational identity. The radical potential of psychoanalysis, for Rose, lies in its concept of the unconscious, which undermines the possibility of such coherence. Adults want to bring children into this sense

of identity as soon as possible, since it forms a "prerequisite for internalisation of rules, precepts and laws" [1984:139].

Rose's analysis of the structure of the Peter Pan story is also relevant here. Its structure of "exploration which is finally held in place by the world which we recognise and know is real" [1984:33] is common to much literature for children. In the Faraway Tree stories, however, the element of the "real" world which holds the most significance is Mother. The adventures form a cycle of journeys away from, and returns to the safety of, the Mother. If, as Rose argues, this repetition "in the sense of doing the same thing over and over again, serves above all to ward off something with which it is impossible to deal" [1984:38], then what is at issue here for little girls is the need to separate from, and the desire to return to, their mothers.

In The Reproduction of Mothering, Nancy Chodorow [1978] argues that since, under the historical circumstances of Western capitalism, mothering is performed almost exclusively by women, then girls will grow up having more difficulties in separating and establishing strong ego-boundaries than will boys. According to Chodorow, a person's sense of self originates in a two-fold process. Firstly, there is the experience of bodily integrity; the sense of the self as a separate entity. This feeling results from experience and develops over time. Secondly,

there is a demarcation of the self from the object world and the growth of a sense of personal identity. This is a relational process and takes place in opposition to others. Since the primary object for most children is female, this process is made easier for boys because of their physical difference and the significance ascribed to it by the wider society. Girls, being more like their mothers, have a greater and longer-lasting identification with them, causing them to experience themselves as less autonomous. Any tale which deals with the "impossible" task of separation from the Mother is likely, therefore, to have resonance for little girls.

Marilyn gives a three-fold reason for her enjoyment of both reading and writing as a child. The first reason she gives is loneliness:

that was just something for me that I needed because I was very shy, very introvert, didn't have many friends. If anything I probably had one friend, I won't crack the joke that even she was imaginary [L] but I just needed something to focus on and I think reading was it. [A2:54:14-19]

Secondly, Marilyn found that reading "was my escape from a humdrum reality or one of feeling quite vague, you know, it was something sort of real for me to relate to" [A2:54:19-21]. This escapism was to become increasingly important in later life; a way of evading pressure. Finally reading and writing are for Marilyn a way of

gaining adult approval. Her parents did not directly encourage these activities; as Marilyn remembers they did little reading themselves and did not read to her or tell her stories. They did, however, praise her use of language:

I suppose if they did encourage me in any way it was more in the way of telling me that my speech was very good for my age and that I could not only converse with adults but as good as adults, you know, and I knew that had come from reading. It hadn't come from anywhere else and I think that spurred me on to keep reading. [A2:54:21-27]

This enjoyment gained from the written word links Marilyn with many other middle- and working-class girls. In the Newson's large-scale study of child rearing in the 1960's it was found that parents reported a significantly higher percentage of girls than boys enjoying both reading and writing in their own time in all social classes [Newson & Newson 1978:122]. Written language appears to have a greater significance in the development of girls than it has for boys.

II Adolescence

Marilyn kept her interest in reading until the start of her teens when she "just completely lost interest." [A2:55:1-2] She went to a secondary modern school, and found the change of environment highly beneficial. At primary school her shyness had earned her the label of "the one who keeps to herself" [A2:55:22-23], but the new place with different people gave her the opportunity

to try and push myself to sort of mix and relate with people and it brought me out of my shell a lot hence that when I made a lot more friends and had a lot more interests there wasn't as much need to escape into reading, you know, reality was better. [A2:55:27-56:5]

Reading and writing, therefore, became largely confined to school requirements. Marilyn counts English as one of the subjects she enjoyed. Being "good at" English continued to be a way of gaining adult approval and praise. Teachers would "compliment you on things", for instance if

they thought you had a good imagination or had any good ideas or if they thought you know, "Come on, you're going to have to work harder cos I know you can do well in this subject" and so forth. [A2:58:25-28]

It also corresponds with the views of the teenagers studied in the mid-1970s by Angela McRobbie, who despite their general disinterest in school subjects, did have "a

marked preference for English" [1991:47].

Marilyn remembers having to write essays and study poems but cannot remember any particular set texts, except the poem "Marsh Marigolds". The exercise which made the deepest impression on her was an oral task; giving a speech on a chosen subject. She chose to talk about reincarnation, and was supported by her teacher who "encouraged me to persevere with it and just in a way get myself moving off to other libraries - just because my local library didn't have enough relevant information to get into town" [A2:57:25-28].

In general terms, Marilyn's attitude to school was the same as the teenage girls studied by McRobbie:

I mean it was just a case of you went to school, you had subjects you liked and didn't like and I suppose you felt obliged to knuckle down to some, you know, so you'd pick out the ones that you thought, "Oh well, I can cope with this, I can manage this", and in a way you were always glad when it was over because there were better things to do once you got outside of school and the mere idea of picking up a book and homework and things, I mean OK, you'd sort of do it when it was sort of, how can I put it, extra compulsory [L], where you knew that, depending on the teacher, if it wasn't done there was going to be trouble and that kind of a way. [A2:59:4-16]

As McRobbie expressed it: "The girls rejected the school

without violently confronting it" [1991:46]. She also found that "the girls showed no interest in discussing their school subjects which were obviously of minimal importance to them" [1991:47].

As in the case of many other teenage girls, essential reading was found in the Jackie magazine. When Marilyn said she lost interest in reading, this only means in reading books. From its first issues Jackie has formed an integral part of adolescent female culture. Not only does it provide reading material; it is also a modern "conduct book" on appropriate feminine behaviour, setting the parameters at a time when conformity to peer group pressure is at a premium. Read alone or in groups, discussed with friends, it is as influential as it is popular.

Angela McRobbie has argued that

Two factors 'saved' the girls from what they otherwise envisaged as an unexciting future; first, their solidarity with each other, their best friend relationships which they saw as withstanding time and married life; and second their immersion in the ideology of romance. [1978:98]

Jackie has important functions to perform in both these cases. It can bind groups of friends together through shared activity while providing an accessible medium through which the "ideology of romance" can be transmitted. As McRobbie also notes, reading the magazine also

provides the possibilities of escapism (fantasies based on situations from the stories) and rebellion (reading for pleasure during school time).

Fiction, generally in the form of cartoon-strip or (later) photo-strip story, forms a large part of the magazine contents. McRobbie has analysed the elements of a typical Jackie story. Plots are usually formulaic (like much romantic fiction written for women), simple and repetitive: "A relationship is formed, threatened and then either consolidated or tragically dissolved" [1981:119]. This structure of initial stasis, followed by disruption then resolution is similar to that which Propp [1958] finds to be the basis of the folk tale. The Jackie story is thus structurally linked to both earlier childhood and later adult reading.

In terms of their content, the stories gloss over and therefore render invisible the contradictions of working-class girls' lives. The social backgrounds of the characters is both standardised and minimised, so that issues of class can be circumvented. The only sexuality presented is heterosexuality, and that only through the filter of romantic convention. The stories end (if not in tears) with a kiss and the hero (as opposed to the two-timing anti-hero) is caring, considerate and undemanding; a junior version of the Mills and Boon hero. McRobbie has argued that "romance displaces and makes irrelevant sexuality and the very real problems it poses for girls.

The implication is that boys' demands and girls' desires rarely go beyond the stage of the clinch" [1981:120]. Advice on what to do should this prove not to be the case is relegated to the problem page, although interestingly this is often read first. Here the content of the girls' letters undercuts the message of the stories, but the answers perform an act of recuperation.

McRobbie has recently updated her analysis, arguing that in the 1980s Jackie shifted its focus from romance to educating the young consumer and providing "facts". It is now more related to other media, such as the pop industry. The time at which Marilyn was a Jackie reader, however, coincided with the point at which the ideology of romance was at its height. McRobbie also reviews critiques of her work which, it is argued, "created an image of Jackie as a massive ideological block in which readers were implicitly imprisoned" [1991:141]. She agrees that her initial reading may now seem "naive" in the light of more sophisticated work done on audience response. Mary McLoughlin, for example, points out the number of uses to which the girls may put both the magazine and the act of reading, while Elisabeth Fraser "shows how readers are rarely 'victims' of the text" [1991:141].

Nevertheless, in the cycle of "women's reading" Jackie forms a structural and thematic link between the childhood fairy tale and the adult romantic story. It marks a stage which young women are supposed to "grow out of" turning to

those magazines which address "you, the reader" as wife and mother, such as Woman and Woman's Own, and more recently Best, Bella and their competitors. Marilyn did not make this required change easily:

I actually read the Jackie magazine up until the age of about 20, 21-22, so I'm a bit late there. [L] You know, when I should have been stepping into the Woman or Woman's Own I was still reading the Jackie.

[L] Very hard transition there. [L] I only made it for appearance's sake. [L] [A2:60:14-20]

This refusal to make the "required transition" is central to the greater part of Marilyn's reading and writing in her adult years and may be related to her agoraphobia.

III Womanhood

After leaving school, Marilyn did little reading and no writing for several years: "I suppose I felt, you know, that's all behind me now. That belongs with school, sort of in the past" [A2:60:23-25]. Both were to re-emerge later, as the result of a felt need: "any reading was left until three years ago when I came out of work and I just found that... it had come into my life again and I needed it again" [A2:61:4-7].

Writing came later, when Marilyn felt she "needed something new" [A2:65:23]. Throughout this most recent phase of reading and writing the texts used and constructed can be divided into two broad categories, escapism and exploration. The first category is self-explanatory and consists mostly of romantic (and historical-romantic) novels and magazine stories. The second is more complex and less easily pinned down. It basically consists of texts through which Marilyn attempts to find ways of coming to terms with her life situation and to take control of it.

i) Escapism

a) Reading the Romance

Ken Worpole argues that the "rigid demarcation line that separates 'popular' and 'serious' writing is a product of class culture" [1983:20]. The particular genres clustered within popular literature are highly gender-marked. Women's fiction and Romantic fiction are generally used as

equivalent terms. The continuing popularity of romantic fiction, despite changes in women's socio-economic and political status, has meant that feminist critics have been forced to take the genre seriously and have begun to analyse the reasons for its appeal. Debates have ensued around the areas of the construction of male and female sexuality [Snitow 1984], romantic violence, women's emotional and economic autonomy [Fowler 1991; McRobbie 1991; Modleski 1984 & 1991; Radway 1984; Taylor 1989] and the accomodation of/ambivalence towards feminism within the texts [Jones 1986]. In general, however, these texts have "been ignored or ridiculed and, by association, the romantic reader patronised and despised" [Taylor 1989:60].

Nevertheless "throughout its long history, the romance has both legitimated female subordination and spoken of the needs of women - hence its lack of appeal for men and, to a lesser extent for 'emancipated' women" [Fowler 1991:7]. Marilyn acknowledges this distinction in discussing her reasons for chosing a women writers' group:

an all-women's group did appeal to me, from the point of view that I was thinking well, you know if my interests lie in writing a romantic novel, especially in the Mills and Boon category, men are gonna laugh at that. ... I mean I dare say there's a lot of women that would laugh and think you know, trivia, because you know, I can appreciate that there would be an awful lot of people could not relate to Mills and Boon and literature of that sort

of calibre, you know. I mean I can respect that, but with men it's just this [...] it would be a different thing. [A2:76:20-77:6]

Romantic fiction is not, however, a homogenous category. It has many strands, several of which Marilyn has read and enjoyed, using each for a different purpose. She categorises her reading hierarchically, placing historical romance and popular authors such as Danielle Steel in a higher bracket than strict formula romance: "I read some really, you know, good novels, as I say, basically just fiction, but very enjoyable and very much different to Mills and Boon" [A2:62:13-15].

In Britain the name Mills and Boon is virtually synonymous with romance. The Mills and Boon formula is as successful as it is simple. The young, inexperienced heroine meets an older, more powerful, sexually experienced, "ruggedly handsome" man. The path of true love does not run smooth, but by the last page he has always proposed. As Janice Radway [1984] has noted, "formula" romances work precisely because of their similarities. The reader is guaranteed a particular reading experience and does not have to read the last page first to check for a successful resolution.

Both the familiarity of the plot outline and the style of writing (in which everything is described in detail and made explicit) reduce the amount of work the reader has to do. This makes the novels ideal for the dual purposes of

escapism and relaxation. In Radway's survey of American romantic novel readers, the single most popular reason for reading this type of book was "for simple relaxation" [1984:61]. Radway believes, however, that women tended to give relaxation as their reason because "escapism" sounds frivolous and neglectful of feminine duties, whereas the two are inextricably linked.

This hypothesis is born out by Marilyn's account of why she read Mills and Boon at the precise moments she did:

I needed [them] at times when my concentration was poor and I felt really low, in that they're so much easy reading. You pick them up and in a sense it doesn't matter how bad you feel, they're not too difficult to follow and it can really take you away from sort of how you are feeling. So it again depends very much on my mood as to what I read, you know. [A2:62:15-21]

The connection of Mills and Boon with feeling "low" is also significant. If life is fulfilling in its own right the "need" to escape would not arise. The escape is as much from bad feelings to good ones as it is to the (frequently exotic and expensive) locations of the novels. Radway's definition of romantic escape is useful here. It is, she argues

a temporary but literal denial of the demands women recognise as an integral part of their roles as nurturing wives and mothers. It is also a figurative

journey to a utopian state of total receptiveness where the reader, as a result of her identification with the heroine, feels herself the object of someone else's attention and solicitude. Ultimately the romance permits its reader the experience of feeling cared for and the sense of having been reconstituted effectively, even if both are lived only vicariously. [1984:97]

Radway is here referring to married women, since her study sample was comprised of them. The argument, however, can be extended to include single women, who also do caring and interactional work, as can be seen in the responses women made to Bridget Fowler's survey: "An unemployed girl of 19, of Indian origin, qualified her commitment to the Mills and Boon genre by saying, 'Yes, I do like them, but you never read them when you've got a man of your own'" [1991:147]. The woman here is acknowledging the "compensatory" value of such fictions, an issue I will return to later.

Marilyn places the novels of Danielle Steel in a higher category, and in several important respects they are more "literary" texts. These novels contain greater variety in plot, characterisation, narrative structure and language use. Rather than ending with marriage they attempt to explore the contradictions women experience during long-term relationships. Whereas formula romances concentrate on the period in which a relationship is established,

these novels explore the difficulties experienced within relationships or the problems of leaving one relationship for another. These relationships do not necessarily include or lead up to marriage, but the married state is privileged.

The typical Danielle Steel novel centres on the life of a woman. The age of the central character varies, but her vulnerability is always stressed and the man to whom she is attracted is invariably older. One of the younger heroines is Kate, only eighteen at the beginning of Season of Passion [1979], when she meets Tom, ten years her senior. Her wealthy parents disown her because they feel she is "lowering" herself by living with a footballer. This again is typical. The heroine's parents are always dead or physically and/or emotionally distant, enabling the hero to take over the major nurturing role. Thus, Tom "took care of her in a way her parents never had" [1979: 23], while she "looked like a beautiful child at their wedding" [1979:29].

Radway explains the phenomenon of the unmothered heroine finding nurturance in the arms of a man by reference to the work of Nancy Chodorow. Chodorow [1978] argues that the gender-differentiated pattern of childcare in western society means that girls have a more problematic path into the (supposed) norm of adult heterosexuality. The primary attachment for both boys and girls is their Mother. Boys' development is continuous in the sense that they need only

transfer their affection from their primary love object to another female. Girls, however, are required to transfer their allegiance from female to male love objects; a transfer which Chodorow argues remains incomplete, leaving women in a bisexual triangle, their primary sexual objects male while their primary emotional objects remain female.

Steel's novels resolve this contradiction by combining masculine sexual power with a feminine capacity for nurturance within the character of the hero. Radway argues that in this sense the novels are utopian:

In effect, the vision called into being at the end of the process of romance reading projects for the reader a utopian state where men are neither cruel nor indifferent, neither preoccupied with the external world nor wary of intense emotional attachment to a woman. [1984:215]

Boys and girls emerge from infancy with a sense of what total intimacy can be like. For both genders, however, relationships with women are dangerous because they represent not only possibilities for strong attachment but also the danger of being sucked back into a primary unity, with a concomitant loss of sense of self. As Chodorow argues, "the internalised experience of self in the original mother-relation remains seductive and frightening: Unity was bliss, yet meant the loss of self and absolute dependence" [1978:194]. These dangers are greater for women, with their weaker ego-boundaries. Men are

therefore a safer choice of emotional object. The price of a less threatening relationship, however, is often lesser fulfillment. Women do not find what they need in relationships with real men and so the romantic hero fills the gap.

Many women begin to read both romantic and Gothic fiction around the time of leaving home and getting married. Tania Modleski [1984] argues that these experiences re-activate the initial separation anxiety felt as an infant. The conflicting desires for autonomy and merger are displaced in the fiction from the Mother to the (safer) male hero/husband. The anxiety can in this way be assuaged. The idealised nature of the hero can therefore also be explained by reference to this additional function his character performs.

Danielle Steel's novels take the "debate" on autonomy a stage further. They are "post-feminist" texts in the sense that feminist demands for a woman's right to a fulfilling career have been registered and taken on board, but have been accommodated by the romantic plot in such a way as to reassure that, underneath these demands, femininity remains unchanged. Women insist upon recognition for their "true" selves, but make these demands within marriage rather than outside it. In "Mills and Boon meets feminism", Ann R. Jones explains this phenomenon through the use of Barthe's concept of the "innoculation effect". In this way a "critique is cited and taken over in ways that

deflate its power" [1986:203].

All Steel's heroines are artists, whether painters, actors or writers, and their search is for a man who will recognise and not be threatened by their creativity in both its maternal and artistic aspects, whilst also recognising them as sexually attractive women. They are sometimes also shrewd business women and again demand recognition for this part of themselves. In Now and Forever [1979], for example, the heroine, Jessica, runs a boutique. She rejects the "love" of a rich and sexually attractive man when she realises that he is grooming her for the part of a society wife; trying to turn her into something she is not. Having sold her business, she returns to her estranged husband (an author) to paint and have children; to "be herself" and do the things she finds genuinely fulfilling. The characters are always rich enough for lack of money not to be a block to self-discovery.

Mr. Right, therefore, is the man who can accept all the facets of the heroine's personality. The hero again carries the double burden of being masculine enough to represent the ideal sexual partner and feminine enough to provide the emotional comfort the mother once did, without threatening the heroine's sense of self. The romantic plot calls for a marriage, or at least a re-marriage, and according to Radway: "this fantasy also suggests that the safety and protection of traditional marriage will not

compromise a woman's autonomy or self-confidence/[1984:-215].

Marilyn also enjoys reading historical romances and the book of this type which she found the most memorable was Once More, Miranda by Jennifer Wilde [1983]. Historical romances offer a greater freedom of character development and plot than most novels with a contemporary setting, though the same issues of autonomy and sexuality are dealt with. Miranda's tale is interesting since the issue of creativity is central to the plot. It is the story of how a woman, working-class by upbringing (though noble by birth) becomes a successful writer (and still gets her man).

In her discussion of Jackie magazine, Angela McRobbie [1991] notes that class is too controversial an issue to be dealt with in stories with a contemporary setting and can only be acknowledged as an element of the past. In formula romance too, class is not an issue, but is "transcended" by heterosexual love. Historical romances, conversely, often do include representations of class, but in carefully circumscribed ways. Class is therefore present rather than absent, but must be dealt with through the conventions of romance rather than those of realism.

Once More Miranda is set in the eighteenth century and divided into sections, beginning with the first person account of the life of Miranda's mother, Honora, an

orphaned governess who falls in love with her charge's widowed father, Jeffrey. They become lovers and when it is discovered that she is pregnant they marry quietly. Jeffrey, however, is killed by a fall on the night of the wedding and Honora dies in poverty. The remaining sections are written in Miranda's voice. Having run away to escape the workhouse, she becomes a pickpocket and is caught by Cameron Gordon, writer and supporter of Bonnie Prince Charlie. Persuaded by a friend to keep her as a bond-servant rather than let her hang, Cam also saves her from a kidnap attempt, after which they become lovers.

Miranda also becomes Cam's secretary and encouraged by Cam's publisher, has a number of short stories of her own published secretly, to great critical acclaim. When Cam discovers this he is furious. When he discovers that she has drugged him to prevent him taking his part in a conspiracy to murder Lord Cumberland, he is so angry that he refuses to take her with him into exile. Cam leaves and Miranda begins "the business of surviving" [1983:403].

Miranda does not only survive but also becomes a successful novelist and society figure, and, by chance, her true identity is revealed. Cam has become a smuggler and breaks into her house one night, swearing it was a mistake to leave her and asking her to join him in America, where he has a new life as James Ingram, newspaper proprietor. Miranda initially refuses, but after helping him escape from the Redcoats, decides to follow.

The written word is therefore crucial to Miranda's identity in several respects. Having been defrauded of the last of her money, literacy is the only possession Honora has left to pass on to her daughter. This becomes the most valuable gift possible since it is through writing that Miranda is able to create a life for herself. She does this firstly by turning the experiences of her earlier years into a series of stories and secondly by turning the whole of her life into a novel, the emerging literary form of the time. This re-creation of her past allows her to project herself into the future; to become the heroine of her own rags-to-riches tale. Finally it is through the written word that Miranda's past is restored to her, her origins explained and her true identity revealed.

Throughout the novel, therefore, writing and identity are linked. While operating on the level of fantasy, the interwoven tales do create a story in which a working-class woman becomes a writer. Though a fiction, Miranda does go some way towards providing a role model for working-class women writers, since "real" working-class women are generally missing from literature, unless as stereotypes or caricatures. For a working-class woman to break through to the status of heroine, however, several constraints apply. Her story is set in the past and couched in the fairy-tale terms of romance. She is, despite her circumstances, "really" of noble blood. The book which contains such a story is "popular" rather than "literary".

Glastonbury also cites as a psychological "prerequisite for authorship" a "conviction of personal worth, a special sense of moral destiny, [which] may readily be extinguished by poverty" [1979:177]. Since Miranda's tale is a fiction this sense may be given to her, and explained by her parentage. Despite these circumscribing conditions, however, her story (and women read romances as the stories of particular women [Radway 1984]) does provide the kind of model which cannot be found elsewhere. The story also tells of the transformation of pain into writing leading to success and the transformation of a life.

Narrative apart, the individual characters of the novel are also important to Marilyn. When asked which characters from books she remembered, it was Cam Gordon who was recalled first and spoken of with enthusiasm:

he was a real rogue, but a rogue with a heart, you know, and I think that's what I liked about him. He was sort of manly and didn't show his feelings but nonetheless they were there and you knew they were there. [A2:63:8-11]

In the novel, Cam is described by Miranda as surly and sullen and infuriating, prey to dark moods and he had a savage streak that was undeniable ... but none of this deceived me. I knew the real Cam, the sensitive, vulnerable man who hid behind the savage facade, and one day, I vowed, he would trust me enough, love me enough, that he would no longer

need to hide. [1983:295]

This prophecy, in accordance with the rules of romance, comes true in the last pages of the book and through the heroine the reader experiences vicariously the satisfaction of having tamed the brute.

Such a hero is useful to women in a number of ways. Firstly, as noted above, the reader is given the opportunity to reach through the "bad" exterior to the "good" interior. By this mechanism women are given the assurance that men are not "really" violent, assuaging real-life fears. Modleski has argued that the "mystery of masculine motives" [1984:32] is central to both romances and gothics. The romantic resolution of the text works so that "male brutality comes to be seen as a manifestation not of contempt, but of love" [1984:41]. In doing this "the novels perpetuate ideological confusion about male sexuality and male violence, while insisting that there is no problem (they are 'very different')" [1984:42-43].

The reverse side of this coin, however, is the anger toward the hero shown by the heroine for the greater part of the text. Part of the pleasure the reader receives is in seeing the hero brought "to his knees" by love, which Modleski characterises as a "revenge fantasy" [1984:43].

The experience of the man's eventual merging with the heroine is psychologically powerful. Chodorow [1978] argues that in heterosexual sex (and the argument may be

extended to literature) a woman identifies with the man as merging with the Mother in order to relive her own experience of unity. In romantic reading the reader is able to shift identification between the characters, becoming Mother and Child by turns, thus experiencing both maternal power and childlike dependency.

Ambivalence to the hero is expressed not directly through attitudes towards him, but in descriptions of the heroine, the other character most clearly remembered by Marilyn. Miranda is a character who

in the earlier chapters of the book... appeals to me. She was spirited and adventurous, independent. [P] What else was she? Wild and kind and brazen. She was a street urchin, you know, to begin with, so she was kind of a bit of a mixture of things. [A2:63:23-28]

The revealing phrase here is "in the earlier chapters", since this locates the attractive and complex personality as existing only before her romantic and sexual involvement with the hero. This signals a recognition that for women attachment to a man leads to a diminishing of spirit, to a loss of self. The significance of this point will become evident when Marilyn's short stories are considered.

It also brings us to the central problem, for feminists, of romantic fiction. Is it a literature of resistance, or a literature of collusion? Some writers read romance as a

kind of compensation for daily life. Bridget Fowler, for instance, links romance with other genres of popular fiction:

In general then, Gramsci suggested that in societies in which the lower classes are systematically denied control over their own lives and in which their surplus value is constantly pumped out by capital, popular literature offers compensatory satisfactions - images of action and excitement to contrast with lives of drudgery and tedium. [1991:32]

These satisfactions, however, like the drudgery, are gendered. "When women try to picture excitement, the society offers them one vision, romance" [Snitow 1984: 265]. Radway argues that romances

can be termed compensatory fiction because the act of reading them fulfills certain basic psychological needs for women that have been induced by the culture and its social structures but that often remain unmet in day-to-day existence as the result of concomitant restrictions on female activity. [1984:112-113]

This explanation is echoed by Marilyn's own reason why she thinks romance is important to women:

Because real life's so bloody awful, you know. [L]
You never get it right and so again it harks back to that escapism, you know sort of, how can I put it, living things out in a different way, sort of

saying, well you know, it isn't right in real life, I can't get it right, but I can read about it and imagine how it could be. [L] Not how it could be [P] I suppose just as an escapism to how I wish it could be. [A2:77:11-18]

This distinction between "how it could be" and "how I wish it could be" points to the utopian element of romance analysed by Radway [1984].

Radway makes a further distinction between the act of reading and the content of what is read. The way in which women use books to claim time for themselves, together with the "utopian" aspects of the texts, enables her to argue that such reading "is used by women as a means of partial protest against the role prescribed for them by the culture" [1984:208].

Radway's ethnographic study of romance readers has been acknowledged as of great importance for feminist criticism. She has been criticised, however, for both her methodology [McRobbie 1991], and the emphasis she places on resistance [Fowler 1991]. Other writers stress the place of romantic fiction within patriarchal ideology:

Lacking access to radical writers, lower-class women have had their images of change colonised by the romance. It anaesthetises rather than defamiliarises contemporary reality. The traditional romance colludes with patriarchy, expressing its rhetoric not as fatalistic common sense but as ideal prin-

ciples. In these female-centred texts, the moment of realism is superseded by the moment of aspiration. In this the ideology of love no longer evokes its antithesis, the ideology of martyrdom, as in the collective experience of women. The social contract between female subjects and their constitutional monarchs ceases magically to be a contract of oppression. The romance represents a schizophrenic oscillation between realism and fantasy. [Fowler 1991:175]

The appeal of the genre, however, lies precisely in the way that it "comforts women, affirms their value, offers to resolve in imagination conflicts that remain unresolved in reality, while at the same time reconciling them to a subordinate place in that reality" [Batsleer et al. 1985: 104]. As Batsleer et al. argue, "fundamental changes in the genre are likely only when the contradictions that shape women's lives are altered or resolved" [1985:105].

b) Writing the Romance

Given that romantic fiction of one kind or another forms a large part of Marilyn's reading history, it is not surprising that her first attempt at writing was in this genre. As with reading, writing was used to answer what was felt as a need:

Well, basically it was just a feeling of after having read so many books over a period of say almost a year and there being very little else in my

life I needed something new, some kind of hobby that would make my life that little bit fuller. [A2:65:21-25]

Having made the decision to write, Marilyn then had to chose what kind of text to produce:

my thoughts then went in the direction of well, why don't I try and write a novel for Mills and Boon, which is short in comparison with a lot of novels. Which when it came down to it was much harder than I expected. [A2:65:25-66:2]

It is a measure of Mills and Boon's success as "easy reading" that many people are surprised to find that they are not "easy writing". Marilyn, in aspiring to write this kind of novel, was however following the path of many authors in this field, from reader to writer.

Radway [1984] distinguishes the act of reading from the content of what is read. The act of claiming time for oneself out of the duties of wife and/or mother is seen as undercutting the messages of the text. The same division can be claimed for the act and content of writing. While the ultimate message of the love story may be seen as confining to women, the act of writing gave to Marilyn the confidence to leave the house (at a time when she was struggling with agoraphobia) and visit the Granada studios to talk to people about the job of make-up artist, which she had chosen as the profession for her heroine.

Romantic writing allows the writer to control the narrative; to put together the ideal man. Satisfactions of this kind are guaranteed because the writer is "shaping everything" [A2:77:21] and ensuring a happy ending. In this way similar pleasures are available to the writer and to the reader. For the most part, however, reading and writing provide different pleasures. One use of reading mentioned by the women in Radway's study and acknowledged by Marilyn is relaxation. Romance reading requires very little effort, once a working knowledge of the formula has been acquired. Writing requires more work and therefore provides a different set of satisfactions, based on exercising one's brain and imagination, bringing a greater sense of achievement.

When asked whether reading and writing brought the same pleasures, Marilyn was adamant:

No, no definitely not because from the reading point of view I see it as escapism. I suppose from a writing point of view people could say, well isn't using your imagination some form of escapism, and to a point I suppose it has to be, but you're always aware of... it's got to be right, the facts have got to be right... I think there's a lot more concentration involved in writing anything than there is with actually reading it. [A2:72:24-73:7]

This demonstrates Marilyn's awareness that what she is doing is performing literary work, an act which is generally denied by the literary establishment to both

working-class and romantic writing.

There are also solid economic reasons for choosing to write romantic fiction. If a woman is to write her way into fame and fortune then romantic fiction, with its mass market and virtually endless demand, is possibly the best route to choose. Mills and Boon receive thousands of unsolicited manuscripts each year, out of which only a handful are selected for publication. The volume of sales, however, ensures a good income for the chosen few. Marilyn is aware of this more unromantic aspect of the business: "romance is so popular so you're looking into a stream whereby you know, there's always a call for it, it's popular. Probably very competitive, but there again you know, if it's very popular it balances out" [A2:78:3-6].

ii) Exploration

When the task of writing a novel proved too large and ambitious for Marilyn she put it to one side. Despite being able to see improvements in the later drafts, she decided that: "I'd bitten off more than I could chew... and so that was kind of put on a back burner and it was sort of back to reading again" [A2:66:12-15]. It was at this time that her social worker suggested that she joined a writers' group, but it took another year before Marilyn felt she was "ready" [A2:66:23] for this.

Joining the group ushered in for Marilyn a new phase in her writing. The escapism represented by romantic fiction

was counterpoised by a type of writing which could best be characterised as "exploration". This writing is linked to the second strand of reading she had pursued:

my reading wavered between the very light fantasy sort of reading where it gets used for escapism and the down-to-earth, lets you deal with, you know, the really nitty-gritty side and see if that can help me in that way - one of which was The Courage to Grieve. I won't go into the reasons why I read that book, except to say that that was how I was feeling. There was no other word to describe the way I was feeling and I wasn't able to deal with it and felt that through this book I would find the courage.

[A2:62:4-12]

The writing group which Marilyn joined worked by taking a topic each week to spark off ideas. For the first few weeks she was able simply to sit and listen to the work of others, without pressure being put on her to write:

for those first couple of times I mean I didn't write anything at all. Basically because it had taken enough out of me just to get here as I've said with having agoraphobia, I felt, you know, my achievement was already done just in getting here.

[A2:67:2-6]

On the third visit the suggested theme for the following week was "What's in a name?" This provided the impetus for her first short story.

The question of quality aside, Marilyn felt it to be an achievement to have written a "short" story at all. At school, keeping to the required length of an assignment had always been difficult. Some teachers refused to read her work because of its length and she was always annoyed by suggestions that it should be cut. Having found that she could now stick to the brief set, Marilyn was both surprised and pleased: "I thought, perhaps I've learnt to cut out all the drivel or, you know, cut the wheat from the chaff" [A2:68:5-6].

Since schooldays, however, (despite the fact of having "grown" into them late) Marilyn has had a wide experience of women's magazines, which provide a model for what a short story should look like. Even without close reading, the magazines are able to indicate word length, appropriate topic, tone and style. In "A Woman's World", Janice Winship [1978] analyses Woman magazine. She argues that the short stories in the magazine range fairly widely, covering a variety of the contradictions of femininity. They do, however, tend to concentrate on three particular moments of a woman's life cycle, first, the problems of meeting Mr. Right and the need to balance a relationship with a man with work and independence; second, the early years of marriage, particularly when there are small children around; finally, the problems of middle-age and the tensions caused when children leave home are also considered.

Marilyn's preoccupations coincide with the first two "moments", one of her stories falling into each of these categories. The first, "What's in a name?", explores the tensions felt by a young woman in the run up to her wedding. The second, written under the workshop heading "Stress and Anxiety", concerns a woman's addiction to tranquillisers. (1) Winship, in "Femininity and Women's Magazines", analyses the structure of magazine stories, arguing that the reader is taken through a "U"-shaped curve of moods, starting at a neutral stage, sliding down into a period of depression and finally being swept up again by a happy ending:

If the short stories are characterised in part by their trade in the problems of femininity, they are also marked by their eventual "narrative solutions". These are not always the traditional and conservative - the happy-ever-after-in-love scenario - but they are, invariably, hopeful and optimistic.
[1983:63]

This structure is used by Marilyn in "What's in a name?", although the optimism is achieved by subverting the usual ending. The story focusses on a young woman as she approaches her wedding. At the opening we are told that she has refused to accept the change in name that marriage traditionally entails and that this has meant that "[e]veryone fussed and complained..." [Name:1]. The picture is thereby given of a woman (never named or described in detail) who is isolated because of her

attitudes. She is about to marry her childhood sweetheart. "Though he was not so sweet anymore. Or at least, not as often as he used to be." [Name:1]

The stage is set, therefore, for the typical act of recuperation where the heroine's doubts are swept away by an act of "sweetness" from the hero. This does not happen. Instead the heroine becomes increasingly aware that her name is a symbol for something much deeper that she is resisting. Listening as her future mother-in-law "rambled" on about the wedding arrangements, she comes to the conclusion that "there was more than just a name at stake here, it was her very identity" [Name:2]. The optimistic note is struck at the expense of the typical romantic ending as the heroine leaves her mother-in-law "making plans for a wedding that would never be" [Name:2].

In this story, Marilyn is able to explore the flip-side of her feelings about romance. In her response to the presentation of the characters in the novels she has read, Marilyn evinced an implicit understanding that romantic attachment to a man necessarily led to a kind of diminution for the woman. This attitude is made explicit in this story, through the symbol of the name. Indeed, the marriage itself is described as "impending" [Name:1], which is linked in most people's minds with "doom". As in much magazine fiction, characterisation is minimal, in order that the woman could be any woman. The story is thus generalised to women's social situation rather than

retrieved by an individualistic and idealistic resolution.

The feelings towards romance expressed through the story remain ambivalent, however, rather than straightforwardly antagonistic. The central character has difficulties in deciding what her stance should be. She describes herself in contradictory terms:

She tried to examine her feelings about what was considered a small, but to her, important issue. Underneath it all, there was definitely an element of rebellion. And yet, she was a conformist wasn't she? She realised it was some kind of vague protest; a wish to be seen as recalcitrant. But of course, it would all be in vain: because, in the end, she would put their wishes first. [Name:1]

This, however, proves not to be the case. The event which crystalises her feelings for her is a discussion with her future mother-in-law. In this way confrontation does not take place with the "sweetheart", but with another woman. There are a number of readings of this gesture. It could be seen as letting men off the hook, or given those literary theories which view the absence of the mother in fiction by women as a way of expressing anger against the excluded figure, it could be read as a way of expressing the anger against men which Modleski [1984] argues is a central concern of romance. A further possibility emphasises the way in which much romantic fiction deals with feelings about separation anxiety; negative feelings about

the Mother being displaced onto the figure of the mother-in-law, often the butt of ill-feeling or "humour" in this society.

The device of the anonymous central character is also used in Marilyn's second story, an untitled piece on the subject of "Stress and Anxiety". This story was another example of a task which appeared easy, but in fact turned out to be difficult, though for very different reasons:

I thought, well, there'll be no problem because I've had so much experience of it. But you know, when it actually came down to it I think when you've sort of been through an experience like that you don't want to write about it and it is actually painful and you don't want to touch on it, you don't want to, you don't actually want to dwell on it. [A2:68:9-15]

Making the central character anonymous could be a way for Marilyn to distance herself from the pain of the lived situation.

This second story again centres around a clash of points of view; this time a series of confrontations with a doctor from whom the woman wishes to obtain tranquilisers. Similar questions of identity and the price demanded of women who conform to the accepted strictures of femininity emerge, as does the issue of "madness" and its treatment.

Both diagnosis and treatment of mental illness have been,

and still are, highly gender-marked, which has led to a number of feminist analyses of psychiatry. Gender bias is generally acknowledged, but the actual meaning of mental illness in women is still highly contested. Some feminists, such as the French writers Cixous and Gauthier and the American psychologist Chesler, believe that madness is a form of protest against women's oppression and that women labelled as "mad" are rebels against patriarchy. This view, while perhaps insightful in a number of cases, can lead to a dangerous romanticisation of mental illness which is helpful neither to those suffering nor to women in general. Elaine Showalter affirms Felman's position, quoting her argument that madness is "quite the opposite of rebellion. Madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation" [1987:5].

Female protest against psychiatric practice is not only a recent phenomenon. In nineteenth century America the fight was pioneered by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who herself underwent the now notorious "rest-cure". The brainchild of Dr. Weir S. Mitchell, the treatment involved bedrest, a special diet and douches. The patient was not allowed to use her hands, except to clean her teeth.

Ellen Bussuk argues that any successes the rest-cure had were due to an "idealizing transference" [1986:150], through which conflicts in the patients relationship with her parents could be resolved through the powerful figure

of the doctor. This would account for its lack of success with feminists such as Gilman and Virginia Woolf: "Their refusal to be 'cured', although painful and entailing its own costs, ensured greater personal growth and the potential for identifying and working through conflict rather than putting it to rest" [1986:150].

For Gilman, the struggle against this regime, which confined the patient to a state of complete passivity, began with the writing of her short novel, The Yellow Wallpaper. For Marilyn too, reservations about the treatment she received are linked to her writing. Both keep their heroine anonymous, so that her story may act as a metaphor for a more general female condition within their respective cultures, and both women retained a degree of ambivalence about their "cures". Tranquillisers can be seen as a modern chemical rest-cure, with the "improvement" of enabling the woman to carry on with her duties.

Susan Stanford Friedman argues that the "end of The Yellow Wallpaper is simultaneously a terrifying defeat and a triumphant victory" [1988:47]. The woman regresses into madness, thus achieving a kind of escape from her doctor/husband. Marilyn's heroine's victory is in acquiring the prescription she wants, manipulating the doctor to her own ends and overturning the usual dynamics of the doctor - female patient relationship [Barrett & Roberts 1978]. The price she pays for victory is not madness, but the

half life of tranquilliser addiction.

Marilyn's story begins with the visit of the heroine to her doctor to request the drug Ativan, a powerful tranquilliser. The reader is taken through the changes in feeling of both doctor and patient as the interview progresses. During this section, the question of identity is again brought to the fore; this time in the gap between the public face and the private pain of the heroine, who throughout the conversation remained "adamant about what she wanted and consistent in her replies that there was nothing wrong" [S&A:1]. "She seemed different today, Certainly nothing like the happy go lucky individual he'd previously administered" [S&A:1]. At the end of the interview the balance of power has shifted and the doctor concedes a prescription for a six week course of the drug.

The story then shifts abruptly (mid paragraph) to an unspecified point ten years in the future. We are presented with both the woman's thoughts on the pros and cons of having taken the tablets and information on the properties of the drugs and the nature of tranquilliser addiction. The "voice" of the text is alternately deeply personal: "Her thoughts of Thank God for those tablets, had become If only I'd never taken them" [S&A:2], or objective and quasi-scientific: "[after] more research had been done, into the strong addictive properties of the drug ... This new discovery caused much controversy and the drug was subsequently banned [S&A:1].

The final section of the story covers, from the same point in time, the period after the banning of Ativan when the heroine had to renegotiate with the doctor for a replacement. By this stage she is no longer "hesitant" or "embarrassed" [S&A:1] but accomplished at playing the system and fully aware of her rights. The text ends with the heroine questioning exactly who was holding the power in the situation:

[O]n her next visit for a prescription he told her "They'll be stopping these soon too". She applied her own pressure. "The Lifeline drug Counselling team haven't told me that." "Okay you can have it, you can have anything you want." She began to wonder who was blackmailing who. One was as bad as the other she decided. [S&A:2]

That this is the text of someone working through their own situation, that it is a text of exploration, is made clear in several ways. There is the previously mentioned raising of the issue of identity. The textual shifts in tone suggest both a problem in finding an appropriate way in which to convey the content of the story, the life of the writer herself, and evidence of the author having read other material on tranquilliser addiction, absorbing the use of the scientific passive tense. The heroine is made to "analyse" her situation and her ambivalence to the drugs she has taken is expressed:

If only she had known that ten years later she would still be going back to him for more of those same

tablets, she might never have been so headstrong that day. [S&A:2]

Still, as she analysed it all, she firmly believed that the tablets had bought her time, in a sense. Time in which to Mature and Come to terms with her life. [S&A:2]

At times she felt only half alive because of them... But at least she was alive, without them she feared she might not have been. It had seemed the lesser of two evils. [S&A:2]

This type of writing might seem on the face of it purely therapeutic, but the situation is actually more complicated. The label "therapy" is often used to discredit writing by people who are, for various reasons, marginalised. It is used as a perjorative, rather than a neutral, term, in a similar way to the label "confessional" which is frequently applied to writing by women. The connection between therapy and creativity is complex and will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. With regard to this particular text, however, it is necessary to point out that Marilyn's writing bears witness to the way in which she has attempted to transform her experience into a creative product.

The text has been deliberately, if problematically, structured. An attempt is made to convey the feelings of both characters, not simply those of the heroine. Despite the dominant tone of realism, chosen as appropriate to the

subject matter, a "literary" language is occasionally employed to give an insight into the hazy world of the addict.

For thousands of addicts, there would no longer be that cushion to soften the blows; nothing to remove the raw edge of pain: No more pretending, only harsh reality. [S&A:2]

At times she felt only half alive because of them living in a Suspended unreality. [S&A:2]

A more obviously literary transformation of her experience was made by Marilyn when she attempted to write poetry. Although she has only made two attempts at writing poems, both of these have been on highly emotive subjects; one on loneliness and one "writing down about what I was going through and how it made me feel" [A2:70:15-16]. Here Marilyn was brought up against the problem of finding an appropriate form for her thoughts. The only poem she could recall from school was "Marsh Marigolds" by Gene Baro, written in blank verse, but despite this retains the feeling that a "proper" poem is one that rhymes. This left her feeling dissatisfied with both: "in a way I feel that I can't win cos if it rhymes its juvenile and doesn't sound right, and if it doesn't rhyme, well its not a poem and it doesn't sound right" [A2:70:6-8].

Marilyn had a particular reason for dealing with these subjects in this way:

I suppose because although I mean I would never have

attempted to write a story about what I had gone through and how that made me feel, that would have been like suicide to me, I couldn't take that, and I suppose in my mind I probably thought that a poem would have been condensing a lot of it and saying more about how I felt rather than what happened to me. [A2:71:6-12]

maybe its a way of trying to look deeper at how or why you feel how you do. [A2:71:23-24]

Throughout this chapter, the point has been made that a woman's life cycle can be mapped through a progression of "girls'" and "women's" texts, which form a route for "normal" femininity. In many ways, Marilyn's passage through the stages of Bunty, Jackie, Woman (etc.) and romantic novels conforms to the classic pattern. These transitions were not, however, made easily. The move from adolescence to adulthood was resisted through the continued reading of an inappropriately young magazine. This refusal, rarely articulated as such, forms the main theme around which her chosen reading and writing clusters.

Romantic fiction is often used by women to work through the problems they have in separating from their mothers. Marilyn's ambiguous response to the (overt and covert) messages of romance may be seen in the pleasure she gains from reading romantic novels, in her responses to the characters she remembers and in her "subversive" "What's in a name" text. The stresses caused by the "very hard

transition" [A2:60:18-19] have shaped both the "escapist" and the "serious" side of her reading and writing and lead to her pre-occupation with identity which may be read through her short stories.

Notes

(1) Marilyn's stories are untitled so I have referred to them by the theme used by the writers' group. Name is the abbreviation for "What's in a Name?" and S&A for "Stress and Anxiety".

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Everyone fussed and complained at her refusal to accept her soon-to-be married name. Why couldn't they just accept her wish to retain her own name? Which was familiar, a part of her: and she didn't like change at the best of times. True, her life was going to change soon anyway with the impending marriage, to her childhood sweetheart. Though he was not so sweet anymore. Or at least, not as often as he used to be.

Maybe she'd take his name and keep her own, a lot of people did that, assumed a double-barrelled name. It had a kind of prestige about it; would make her seem different. She would adopt a

new status from that day on. Marriage changed people, not only their name, you only had to observe people to know that.

Did the idea please her? she wondered, or did it actually make her feel threatened? neither, she decided. It was purely and simply one more principle or rule, - or whatever you wished to call it, being inflicted on her freedom as an individual. Yes, it was kind of scary she acknowledged. From that day on, she was no longer to be seen as a person in her own right, but as part of a couple: the traditional other half. She tried to examine her feelings about what was considered a small, but to her, important issue. Underneath it all, there was definitely an element of rebellion. And yet, she was a conformist wasn't she? She realised it was some kind of vague protest; a wish to be seen as recalcitrant. But of course, it would all be in vain: because, in the end, she would put their wishes first.

They were delighted she was no longer making an issue out of nothing. How silly she had been, fretting about something so trivial. It was a relief to be rid of the uncertainty.

Of course there would have to be one or two changes with the wedding arrangements, just small ones, her mother-in-law told her, said reassuringly. The flowers she'd chosen would be unsuitable she felt and would be best left in her experienced hands. "Oh, and I think a two-tiered cake will be quite sufficient" she

added, 'no need for extravagance, of course, you'll learn a lot more about that when you've been married a while' she added meaningfully. The bride-to-be shifted uncomfortably, she hated being patronized.

'I must say though' she went on, 'you could have chosen a better venue for the reception. Very inconvenient. It'll be difficult for a lot of our family to get to.' She put a lot of emphasis on the our, letting her know she thought her inconsiderate. 'That reminds me' she continued 'I must make arrangements for the wedding cars' she tutted looking every inch the martyr, loved looking like she'd been put upon. 'I think two cars will be quite adequate' she nodded to herself, looking satisfied. 'Isn't it traditional for a bride to be accompanied only by her father?' the bride-to-be put in, realising there were some things she did not wish to change. This was one custom she wished to adhere to. 'Oh, don't worry about a little thing like that, anyway I thought it would be best if you take Matthew in your car. She paused smiling, 'He's going to look lovely in his pageboy suit, wine coloured velvet complete with bow tie, his mother made it specially. He's really looking forward to it...' her voice droned on and on. Anyone would think it was the wedding and he'll probably look a solemn little brat, she thought resentfully.

On and on she rambled only now her companion ceased to hear a word she was saying. Everything became more clear now, the anxiety that had been gnawing at her ebbed away swift and delightfully. She realised there was more than just a name at stake here, it was her very identity. She left her making plans for a wedding that would never be. Of course, she should have told him then and there, but she knew she'd try and talk her round. And why spoil a few more weeks of unnecessary planning, for someone who had nothing better to do? No, she was not a spaz but she soon would be!

The End

'Hello, what can I do for you?', the Doctor's cheery smile and friendly greeting always made her feel more optimistic: though for some reason today was different. She was unable to return his enthusiasm. She paused, then sat down. 'You're very quiet, but got your tongue?' he asked, looking amused whilst retaining his professional manner.

'I'd like some Ativan please' she said it hesitantly, feeling embarrassed.

'Do you know what they are?' he asked in incredulous tones. She nodded that she did. 'What does a young girl like you want with such a strong tranquilliser?' It was said more as a statement than a question. She remained silent. He seemed to be perturbed; more than likely at her temerity in telling him what she wanted, rather than asking his diagnosis, she thought drily.

He studied her for a moment. She seemed different today. Certainly nothing like the usual happy go lucky individual he'd previously administered. Right now she seemed distant and subdued, as though oblivious to what he was saying. He tried to get her to open up and tell him what was wrong with her. 'How can I help you if you won't tell me what the problem is?' he was saying. His words fell on deaf ears. Although he persisted, she was adamant about what she wanted and consistent in her replies that there was nothing wrong. All of which only strengthened his resolve to dissuade her. 'I can't give you Ativan, it would be both morally and professionally wrong' he stated, hoping she would understand and respect his opinion. She didn't answer him, nor did she look at him. 'I'll give you something else, something a bit milder' he said reasonably.

'I don't want anything else, I want Ativan' she insisted firmly.

'Do you know what you're asking of me?' His face wore a bewildered expression. She didn't answer him. She couldn't. There was too much at stake. He looked somewhat helpless now, all she had to do was sit tight. After all, it was his job to help her she reasoned silently. She was not usually so intransigent, but on this occasion it came naturally. 'People more than three times your age who've seen two world wars resort to taking these' he continued exasperated.

'If I don't get those tablets I won't live to be their age' she retorted bluntly. He noted how tenacious she could be

and gave a deep Sigh. 'All right, I'll give you a prescription for a six weeks course' he conceded reluctantly. 'But there'll be no more after that' he warned. 'yes' she smiled, 'that's what you bloody think, she thought. If only she had known that ten years later she would still be going back to him for more of these same tablets, she might never have been so headstrong that day.

She hadn't considered that she would become more and more dependent on them as time went by. By the time more research had been done, into the strong addictive properties of the drug, it was too late. The damage had already been done. This new discovery caused much controversy and the drug was subsequently banned. For hundreds of thousands of addicts, there would no longer be that cushion to soften the blows; nothing to remove the raw edge of pain: No more pretending, only harsh reality. There was no question of coming straight off the drug, it was potentially dangerous, beside which people needed them just to be able to function properly: The only way was to wean off slowly. Her thoughts of Thank God for these tablets, had become If only I'd never taken them. She'd become a mere Junkie, her Doctor the unwilling pusher. Even though she'd been warned, she had never really understood the consequences. Still, as she analysed it all, she firmly believed that the tablets had bought her time, in a sense.

Time in which to Mature and Come to terms with her life, shambles though it was. Because she was still in this mess, it was hard to know for sure if she'd been right. At the time she had seen them as a solution, she now realised they presented yet one more problem.

At times she felt only half alive because of them living in a suspended unreality. But at least she was alive, without them she feared she might not have been. It had seemed the lesser of two evils. Until that is, the prescriptions were no longer forthcoming and she had to face the hideous withdrawal. 'I'll give you something to help you come off them, something a bit milder' the Doctor had said.

A feeling of Dejavu washed over her. 'You shouldn't have been on them in the first place' he'd said in a somewhat I told you so manner. And you shouldn't have given them to me she thought.

On her next visit for a prescription he told her 'They'll be stopping these soon too'. She applied her own pressure. 'The Lifeline drug counselling team haven't told me that'. 'Okay you can have it, you can have anything you want. She began to wonder who was black-mailing who. One was as bad as the other she decided. ②

Chapter 6: "Trying to Give a Flavour of What It Was Like"

I Childhood

Doreen was born in Dublin in 1934. Third of four children, she had two elder sisters and a younger brother. Her father worked until his seventieth year for the Dublin Gas Company, doing what would now be considered skilled work, but at the time was classified as labouring. After his retirement, her mother worked in the kitchens of Dublin hotels and as a cleaner and stacker in a library. The family were poor and the area of Victorian terrace houses where Doreen grew up has since been demolished.

Unlike Kate's childhood in Salford, there is no ready-made framework to slot Doreen's experiences into. The lack of research and written material, both historical and contemporary, on the subject of Irish women has been noted by Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy [1989], Mary Cullen [1991] and Jenny Beale:

It is difficult to get a clear picture of women's role in the Ireland of the 1930s to 1950s. Personal memories, the occasional government report and the literature of the period all help, but there is a serious lack of anthropological and sociological data. [1986:22]

There is a similar lack of data pertaining to girls and young women for the time Doreen was growing up. The major study of an Irish community in the 1930s was conducted by

Arensberg and Kimball [1940], but focussed on a rural area rather than urban Dublin and the rural/urban dichotomy in Irish life makes it difficult to generalise from its findings.

Doreen's early relationship to reading materials was governed by two principles, scarcity and censorship. The first of these was dictated by poverty and lack of time for reading. Of her father and mother she says, "I just can't remember him reading at all and I can't remember seeing her... I don't know when they would've read." [A3:82:25-27] The household stock of books numbered "less than half a dozen ... including the dictionary" [A3:95:8-9] and "an old history I remember cos I used to do my homework from it" [A3:83:2-3] and a book "to do with Catholicism... my Father was a, I found it out later, had been converted to Catholicism, so it was a kind of guide, a guidance for him" [A3:83:21-24]. The local library had a children's section, but the difficulty lay in getting past the porter, who considered it his job to keep the library steps tidy, that is free of kids: "We had a local library but we were often chased out" [A3:84:13-14].

Other books and magazines which came into the house were those which would have been shared round the neighbourhood like the Girls' Crystal, the Beano and the Dandy, and also women's magazines like the Red Letter which "would've been passed from one neighbour to another" [A3:82:19] and which children found lying round the house. Many of these would

probably have been classed as "unsuitable" reading for young girls.

This lack of things to read, suitable or otherwise, did not dampen Doreen's enthusiasm. "I think had I had books around - I'm being honest about this - I think I would've read a lot more, and I don't think I would've even needed the encouragement" [A3:103:8-11]. Rather she engaged in ingenious strategies for gaining access to more books, regardless of their suitability:

there was this neighbour who lived a couple of doors down who was an alcoholic, [L] she used to send me for porter anyway, [L] and used the booklending as a sort of subterfuge for grabbing hold of me [L] to send me to the pub [L] to get her a jug of porter. But she used to lend me sort of... well love interest kind of stories... [A3:103:11-17]

These books would definitely have been considered unsuitable. This issue of suitable/unsuitable reading was a constant throughout Doreen's childhood. Of the Red Letter she says,

penny dreadfuls or tuppenny dreadfuls or something like that they used to be called... but they weren't appropriate, or they weren't considered appropriate for children. I think I was about ten, reading about steamy passion and stuff like that. [A3:82:7-13]

I can remember my father didn't approve of them... he used to say penny dreadfuls or something like

that and call them devil's sort of books or that kind of thing. [A3:82:19-23]

Books which were "suitable" were either specially written or expurgated, like the version of the Arabian Nights that Doreen finally managed to borrow from the library. These stories would have been taken from the original Thousand and One Nights, a collection of folktales from India, Persia and the Arab world. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, possibly in Cairo, these tales were finally drawn together and translated from several sources into the collection from which most European versions are taken [Dawood:1973]. From the beginning these tales were adapted into stories aimed at children:

Didactic writers for children in the eighteenth century took over the trappings of the "Persian tale" for their own moralizing purposes finding (as Hannah More did with her adaptation of chapbook formulae for what was to become the Religious Tract Society) that popular forms could provide a disguise - however thin - for conventional morality.

[Alderson 1988:82-83]

This moralising take-over explains how a set of explicitly bawdy folktales could become thought of as primarily children's classics (such as Aladdin, Sindbad the Sailor and Ali Baba) which survived the heavy censorship of reading materials in the Ireland of the 30s and 40s. As Doreen says of this time, "censorship was quite heavy in

Ireland" [A3:85:20-21] and recent campaigns, such as that of the Article 19 group based on the article of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights which set out the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, bear witness to the fact that it still is. Censorship in Ireland was officially coded in the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act, which allowed the Censorship Board to ban books for any of three reasons: indecency or obscenity; having a large amount of text referring to crime; advocating of birth control. Although some writers campaigned against the act, the

rhetoric by which the majority of the people were swayed was that of Ireland's priests and politicians, who believed that by purging Ireland of all "indecentencies" and foreign influences, they could shape it into a spiritual model for the world.

[Carlson 1990:8]

The strength of censorship is due in part to the relationship between Church and State. The Roman Catholic Church plays a major role in Irish education and cultural life, and has an important, though diminishing, influence on people's beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. At the time of the Censorship Act, Catholicism and nationalism combined, equating "Englishness" with immorality. English newspapers, for example, were burnt in the streets for their coverage of divorce cases [Carlson 1990]. The Catholic Truth Society took up an unofficial advisory role, and many books were banned on the strength of

passages its members cut out and sent in to the Board.

Books which were considered proper reading for girls were full of messages about femininity, as Doreen recognises:

the kind of book that was acceptable, that was sort of recommended reading in English for young girls were books by a writer called Annie M. P. Smithson ... they were horrible, they weren't at all enjoyable... I was reading them as a kind of duty, this is what I should read, and they were like intended to shape your mind as to how a proper woman behaves ... extreme passivity, that kind of thing...

[A3:85:22-86:4]

Annie M. P. Smithson was born in Dublin in 1873 of an Anglo-Irish family. She was educated in Dublin and Liverpool and became a nurse, midwife and district nurse. Between 1929 and 1942 she was secretary and organiser of the Irish Nurses Organisation. Although brought up a Protestant, she converted to Catholicism after an affair ended and during the Civil War worked as a nurse in the Moran's Hotel seige. She began writing later in life, publishing her first novel in 1917. Her concerns with Catholicism, nationalism and nursing are reflected in all her books. "Patriotic, frankly sentimental, her writing had a freshness and innocence that soon made her a bestseller in Ireland, the most successful of all Irish romantic novelists" [Brady & Cleeve 1985:224].

Smithson's first novel, Her Irish Heritage, concerns a half-English, half-Irish young woman, left penniless after the death of her father. She visits her maternal uncle and his family in Dublin, regaining her "Irish heritage" of Catholicism and nationalism, realising the truth about English rule. Many of Smithson's heroines are orphaned, often being left without the private income they expected. Many books feature a convert whose example saves the heroine, or a figure who appears after their death to convince another character of eternal life. The novels are all romantic stories, though within the strict boundaries of Catholic morality. Love outside these bounds can bring no true happiness. Marriage brings fulfillment for women, but unmarried women are depicted as having interesting and useful lives, often as nurses. Nurses often appear as saviours of other characters or as moral examples. In The Marriage of Nurse Harding, the marriage in question, between the Catholic Nora Harding and the estate-owning Anglo-Irish Victor Hewdon, is used as a device to heal the splits in the Irish population. Heterosexual romance thus transcends class and religious boundaries.

Many of the characters are involved in the nationalist movement, fighting for an Ireland characterised as "Dark Rosaleen". Nationalism and martyrdom are frequently linked:

they were surrounded with that atmosphere - almost a halo - of patriotism - the true patriotism which believes in deeds rather than words, and which goes

to suffering or to death in that quietly determined and matter of course fashion characteristic of our young men in Ireland today. [The Walk of a Queen 1988:6]

The high moral tone of the books is reflected in the fates and voices of various characters and in the authorial voice:

the Soul of a nation cannot be slain, and through our spirituality we will survive... [The Walk of a Queen 1988:120]

The Catholic faith alone that night kept him from putting a revolver to his head and going forth into everlasting darkness. [The Walk of a Queen 1988:213]

If ever a girl possessed "a heart at leisure from itself, to sooth and sympathise", that girl was Nora Connor. From her earliest years she had been absolutely unselfish - or rather selfless, for she never seemed to think of herself at all. [Nora Connor 1989:40]

This kind of feminine ideal is contrasted with the behaviour of other women:

He looked at some of the girls lying on the sands, "sun bathing", in very scanty bathing togs. He was no prude, but he did not like to see girls making themselves so cheap, stepping down from that pedestal upon which every decent-minded man has placed Womanhood. [Paid in Full 1990:15]

Smithson's books contain precisely the blend of Catholic

morality and nationalist fervour which the new government was trying to promote, particularly through the schools. The school was an important agent for censoring or approving reading material, and even fairly innocuous matter could bring down the wrath of the teachers. The Girls' Crystal, for example, ran from the 1930s to the 1960s and in a 1938 survey of English twelve to fourteen year olds was the third most popular girls' magazine of the time [Drotner 1988]. Doreen described it as

a bit of a jolly hockey sticks, right, about the 1940s. Somebody brought that into the school and there was all Hell let loose [L] ... They were very disapproving of that, so I think it was around about that time we were told more or less what we could read, and if they knew I was reading the Red Letter [L] they'd go mad [L]. They'd go bananas. [A3:101:24-102:4]

Again it was the combination of Englishness and immorality which aroused the magazine's condemnation by the teachers.

Another important influence in Doreen's childhood was story-telling, though the context of the telling may be as important as the content. When I asked her who she could remember reading to her or telling her stories as a child, she replied: "My mother never, right, from which I gather that it's not just my memory's fault here, I don't think she did tell me stories" [A3:87:28-88:2]. This coincides with the feeling expressed by the women interviewed in Beale's book that one of the things that has changed in

Ireland over the last generation is the amount of time women have to spend with their children. Mothers were frequently too busy to have time (and energy) left for "luxuries" like story-telling. As Audrey, a middle-class woman from a rural area who was born in the late 1930s expressed it:

I feel I missed out on a lot as a child. I mean the times we had conversations are milestones I remember. But that was the way everybody was brought up. People spent very little time with their children. People had far too many children for a start, and they were seen as an inevitability of marriage. There was no parenting, apart from disciplining or whatever. [1986:53]

Her mother was still responsible for much of Doreen's contact with traditional story-telling, however, since she took her children for a fortnight each year to visit relatives in the country:

My mother was not from Dublin, she was from a place in the midlands called Carlow, and I remember going down to the country - we call it the country right, as opposed to the city - and I've some feeling of having stories there, round... a great big fireplace ... you could sort of sit into it, and people telling stories there and singing songs and that kind of thing, in this big sort of stone-flagged kitchen... [A3:90:27-91:7]

Although Doreen could not remember examples of the stories

she heard (the songs have stayed more in her memory "and they're stories in themselves" [A3:91:14-15]) the atmosphere of those occasions has stayed with her.

Although Doreen's mother did not tell her stories, her father did. They were not, however, of a traditional nature. Born in 1871 and therefore in his 60s when she was born, he had lived through some of the most important events of Irish history and witnessed the violent actions of the colonial forces. His stories were full of violence and hints of further knowledge. He died when Doreen was only 12 and one of the things she regrets about this is not being able to ask him more about his history:

he used to tell me fairly blood-curdling kind of things, [L] really insensitive things about, he was describing the rack to me one time... in sort of gory detail... I knew I couldn't come to any harm cos he was sort of very kind and it was safe to be hearing all this stuff, like nobody was going to grab hold of me and put me on the rack. But for some reason that sort of sticks in my mind, cos it was so horrible. And I don't quite know why he was telling me all this, telling me about something that I now realise was to do [with] Dublin [as] a garrison town, now I didn't know that, it wasn't a garrison town in my time, but what he was describing about the soldiers I realise that it was... and things to do with how... people would know which side you were on and stuff like that, by certain things you did

and said. [A3:88:11-29]

Although Doreen remains uncertain of her father's purpose in telling her these things she believes they were important in setting up an "exchange" [A3:89:2] between them, whereby he passed on pieces of his knowledge of what it was like to live through the time of the Home Rule campaigns, the Easter Rising and its aftermath and the establishment of the Free State, while she told him Irish mythological tales and taught him pieces of Irish language which she was learning in school. Through this process they were constructing meanings of Irishness, as people with a particular relationship to violence, colonial oppression and language.

Doreen's father's stories were also significant in constructing her ideas of what story-telling is - a means of conveying a specific message or moral. In this way it is the underlying meaning which is more important than the story which forms the vehicle for it:

there [were] some other points... sort of influences, and they wouldn't come into the terms of story-telling, but they're kind of like the messages without, you know when you tell a child a story there's a sort of moral to it... he would give me the moral without the story. [L] [A3:90:17-23]

While Doreen's case may be extreme, it is not unique, though it is not possible to gauge how common it was. Anne

Higgins, also born in the 1930s, but in Manchester, remembers that her father, a Republican:

told me lots of stories about 1916, the Civil War, Michael Collins and other people whom he'd met when he was in Dublin. That was the high point of his life probably, that exciting period between 1912 and 1928 and he talked a lot about it. He was a great storyteller naturally and he told us stories every night when he took us to bed. [Interviewed by Lennon, McAdam & O'Brien 1988:147-148]

Due to the fairly rigid sexual division of labour in nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland, these were stories to which men would have had greater access than women. Although many women did take part in the republican campaigns, their role was often different from that of men. This gendered relationship to story-telling also positions its listeners differently, as would a written text.

Despite the family's poverty, Doreen went on to have what would have been thought of as a "good" education. After starting at an ordinary National School at five or six, she was one of the children chosen to move to an Irish language school. She does not know the reason why she was chosen, but believes that she might have been thought to show "promise" because of her ability to draw and to do lettering in both Irish script and copperplate:

This other school that I went to by the way... I

think you were meant to have some abilities to get into it. I mean we were only seven, six or seven, so there was no test or anything but some kind of aptitude I think was required, and maybe I was the token poor kid. [A3:96:26-97:2]

Even if tokenism were not the reason for Doreen being chosen, it was certainly the result of this decision:

I think the idea of it was to have something, it was post-independence right, to have some sort of place where... the children who went there could get a grounding in Irish language and mores or what-have-you, to fit them for professional life... most of the girls there would've gone on to become teachers themselves, or one girl wanted to be a journalist I remember... they would've gone on to secondary school and that wasn't for the likes of me. [A3:97:10-18]

At the time Doreen was going to school the Irish state was still young and education was felt to be of crucial importance in throwing off centuries of colonial oppression and of asserting independence:

Inspired by the ideology of cultural nationalism it was held that schools ought to be the prime agents in the revival of the Irish language and native tradition which it was held were the hallmarks of nationhood and the basis for independent statehood. Many people held that the schools in the nineteenth

century had been a prime cause of the decline of the Irish language; under a native Irish government the process would have to be reversed. [Coolahan 1981:38]

In 1938, the programme of primary instruction was revised to include all-Irish teaching for infants. This policy proved difficult to implement, partly through a lack of Irish-speaking teachers. At the time at which Doreen was at school, however, Irish-language teaching was at its height: "The number of all-Irish primary schools increased from 228 in 1931 to 704 by 1939 but this formed the peak and by 1951 the number had fallen to 523." [Coolahan 1981:42] This fall in numbers occurred because it was realised in the 1940s that education alone could not bear sole responsibility for language revival, particularly in an economic climate in which emigration to the English-speaking world was the reality for many young people [Brown 1981].

The kind of education the Irish-language school offered, therefore, was geared to producing an autonomous Irish middle class, and it was this that led to Doreen's sense of isolation: "I was a bit of an oddity in that school, because it was mostly the children I would say of teachers, the professionals, in and around Dublin, that would've gone there" [A3:86:13-16] (1).

Theories regarding the difficulties working-class children

have in schools can be illustrated by this anecdote:

I remember... being asked [to write], the essay was "What is the Importance of History?" ... The teacher said it was a dreadful essay, she'd never come across anything as bad in her life. And then one of my... class mates... talking about the Crusades now, like religious history, and I hadn't even considered that, I didn't know about it right, despite all the sort of religious teaching we had, I didn't know about the Crusades. And it's only sort of in retrospect that I realise that that young Miss right, would've had older brothers and sisters, maybe going on to university, maybe at secondary school, and books in the house where she could have had that kind of information, and I didn't have that sort of backup to find out about things like that. And I didn't know how to have access to it either ... I felt a bit alienated at school to say the least. [A3:87:6-25]

The kind of "backup" which Doreen realised she lacked was what Pierre Bourdieu [1977] has described as cultural capital, one of the ways in which the bourgeoisie reproduces itself in power. The point about understanding the experience in retrospect is important here; at the time Doreen had no framework to explain her situation to herself, she simply coped as best she could. Similarly, her not knowing why she came to be transferred from one school to another demonstrates the ways in which the

education system retains a mystique which few working-class families penetrate; they are controlled by the system rather than being in control of it:

I was actually in the scholarship class at one point, but even then I knew I couldn't make it, I didn't have the whatever it takes to get things together... it's this thing to do with backing, and your enthusiasm goes. I remember feeling sort of despondent and not knowing where I was up to with things, and finding it quite a hard struggle as well. [A3:97:19-26]

The only mention of poverty, whether urban or rural, was in a romanticised, poetic context. There is a tradition in Irish poetry which referred to Ireland as Sean Bean Bocht, the Poor Old Woman. Doreen remembers:

one [poem] about an old woman, an old woman of the roads. It's a bit of an irony this, cos this would've been one of the dispossessed right, and it's ironic that they were quite snobbish in our school, and didn't understand the poor at all, and yet they had stuff like this on the curriculum... [A3:100:27-101:3]

Despite this unpromising background of poverty and structured failure, Doreen's creativity manifested itself early:

something that I forgot until fairly recently was that as soon as I could write - as soon as I learnt

to read then I learnt to write... I remember writing a poem... I would've been about eight. I didn't learn to read till I was about six or seven, seven I think. And this poem was in English and I did a drawing with it as well... [A3:91:20-27]

These abilities, to write and to draw, were frequently linked and were a source of pleasure, of approval at school and at home, and the means of educational advancement, since they provided the evidence of ability which led to Doreen being chosen to go to the Irish-language school:

the reason I remember [the poem] was that one of the girls in school showed it to the teacher and, "Isn't it good", this kind of thing... [A3:91:27-92:1]

And I remember my sister, my older sister... saying to me, "Did you write that?" This isn't the poem, this is sort of a story that I wrote round about 12... she was usually quite critical of me... and when she said, "Did you write this, did you do this?" I remember trying to think, should I deny it and try to get out of it, cos I thought there was going to be some trouble about it, or embarrassment about it. And then she seemed really pleased, "It's wonderful" or something like that. [A3:92:2-14]

Parental reaction to Doreen's writing was mixed. When asked if they encouraged her, she initially answered no, but then modified this: "my mother was quite disapproving

of me as a person" [A3:92:25-26] but "my dad was if anything encouraging" [A3:93:6] though again this encouragement was constrained by poverty and lack of time. For example:

I can remember drawing and writing in the margins of books... and you know somebody, I can't remember, maybe my sister, saying, "My dad'll give you Hell", you know for doing that to his book... He must have discovered it, but he never complained... so that's like encouragement, I consider that encouragement that he never criticised it. [A3:94:1-11]

Doreen's father also provided more direct encouragement, both as a model and a guide:

My dad used to do copperplate writing sort of beautifully, really nice to look at. He was the person in the street that people came to if they wanted letter writing done. I think a lot of people maybe couldn't read and write well... so he used to sort of sit down and write letters for them, on their behalf... [A3:94:15-21]

I also learnt to do copperplate, but from him, not from school. [A3:94:24-26]

when I used to go on holiday to the country... he'd write letters... he'd put sort of jokes in there or puzzles you know, or riddles or something like that, and I'd write back what the answer was... [A3:93:7-14]

This memory led Doreen to compare herself with the other children in her district, rather than those at school:

I think I was luckier than, like most of the children in our street... Like if there were less than half a dozen books in our house, including the dictionary there were none in many of the houses that I've gone into, just none... [A3:94:6-11]

Doreen also remembers one friend, another young girl, with whom she used to write:

one particular friend I remember, we were both about ten... she knew her letters but she couldn't read and write... we used to write stories together. Sort of find a bit of paper and make things up or write poems, well rhyming things... and drew pictures, that kind of thing. [A3:93:19-25]

The main theme Doreen recalls writing about as a child was fantasy: "it was a fantastical kind of a story, it was about sort of supernatural powers or something like that some child had" [A3:92:14-16]. She created "this sort of never-never land" [A3:92:21]. This ties in with her enjoyment of the Arabian Nights and of geography at school: "because it involved drawing and the notion of far away places... American names [?] like Albuquerque... and African and South American names... were fascinating and... your imagination could... sort of roam..." [A3:98:28-99:4]. Many of the traditional Irish folktales also

feature other worlds, fantastical creatures and heroic deeds.

This interest and investment in fantasy is one way children have of expressing the wish that things might be other than as they are. This contrasts with the need of adults to explore what did happen, within the terms of realism, although this can also be used to express the idea that things might have happened differently; that they might happen differently next time. Fantasy also helps both children and adults to work through psychic difficulties they are faced with.

II Adulthood

Childhood and adult writing are clearly divided into two distinct phases in Doreen's life. On leaving school her writing (and most reading) stopped while she became immersed in the problems of finding a job and earning a living. She became at first a shorthand typist, but was dismissed from that job and decided to emigrate to England, moving to London in April 1954. After a couple of clerical jobs, she was accepted into nursing, beginning her training in Hammersmith.

Doreen made a career in nursing, working as a midwife and theatre nurse in London, Cardiff, Birmingham, Surrey, Nigeria and finally Manchester, where she worked until the early 1970s when a back injury forced her to give up her job. At this point she returned to college, passed O and A levels and was awarded a General Arts Degree by Manchester Polytechnic. She also did a teacher training course, although she did not work as a teacher. She has had a number of part time or temporary jobs and now teaches Irish language once a week at an adult education centre.

This migration and employment pattern is typical of Irish women of Doreen's generation. The practice in post-famine rural Ireland of passing each farm onto one (usually the eldest) son meant that emigration was a necessity for many young Irish people from the rural areas, since alternative employment was scarce. Ireland's deliberate policy of

isolationism and the problems of its industrial economy, devastated by partition, also meant that many people deliberately chose emigration for its promises of higher wages and a more exciting lifestyle [Brown 1981].

Ireland is unusual both for its exceptional number of emigrants and in that at many points in its history women formed the greater proportion of its emigrants:

In the aftermath of the war Britain was rebuilding its economy and its need for workers was greater than ever. Irish people left for Britain in their hundreds of thousands, and it was during this wave of emigration, a particularly great haemorrhage of people from the land, that the numbers of women over men emigrating reached its highest point. [Lennon, McAdam & O'Brien 1988:25]

Owing to the post-war shortage of nursing trainees in England, many Irish women took up the SRN training opportunities denied to Black women, who were more likely to be pushed onto lower grade SEN courses [Lennon, McAdam & O'Brien 1988; Bryan, Dadzie & Scafe 1985]. It was also important that most English hospitals, unlike those in Ireland, did not charge for training [Rudd 1988].

During her twenties and thirties, Doreen found that she had little time or enthusiasm left for books, despite the encouragement of her brother-in-law:

In the period between 16 and 20 I think I hardly read at all, and I couldn't find anything in books.

[A3:105:14-16]

I was... nursing by this time and sort of worn out and tired and studying as well so I didn't really read that much... [A3:106:7-10]

So how and why did Doreen turn to writing again as an adult? The initial impetus, despite her misgivings, came from the advice of a friend:

I'd written to her because I was distressed and I wanted help. I'd no-one to talk to [L] and I thought of all the people that I could write to that she'd be the one who would best understand. I don't know that much that she did, but that's not her fault, right. [L] She did write back and say it helped her to write. [A3:119:10-16]

At first Doreen did not think this was a good idea, but she "did develop it, even if initially I thought well it's not, you know it's not good advice, I did sort of take it up and started to jot things down" [A3:121:5-8]. This development took place in terms of a pre-occupation of her own; the need to find words for problematic situations:

One of the things that I've found helpful was to try and describe things that were troubling me... on top of the sort of distress I felt as a young person, and as a middle-aged or thereabouts woman, was the fact that I couldn't explain it to myself properly, I couldn't understand it properly, and as a sort of means of explaining it better to myself I tried

always to find the right words and to be precise about, to describe it best. [A3:119:16-28]

Writing allows Doreen to explore her experiences, to name them in a way that is meaningful for herself, and thus extend the power she is able to exercise over life. When asked what aspect of her writing gave her the greatest pleasure, she replied:

I think the, even if it sounds a bit perverse, [L] I probably like the thing about... being able to take control in writing over a situation that when it happened I'd no control. I think I've gone through life as a victim, that sounds pathetic doesn't it! I've gone through life not being able to fight back, or not winning... So writing is... just to make intelligible to me quite what went on and what were the possibilities as well. [A3:128:1-18]

Writing can therefore be a weapon, a way of fighting back against personal and social injustice:

I was listening to these women talking on the radio - a sort of Woman's Hour, it's called Liveline - listening to them talking about their experiences, one of them was awful, but it reminded me of this incident that happened to me, that I never would've dreamt of writing about and then suddenly I had it, the sort of revenge thing again, of getting my own back on people who behaved badly towards us... [A3:126:5-12]

Although this is important, writing for Doreen is fundamentally a means of self-expression, and in this the process may be more important than the medium chosen:

it is... a form of communicating. I think everybody's got something... And it's a way of expressing... yourself and the things around you, describing them. And I certainly like listening to other people, you notice when I'm chatting and hearing them, their accounts of their lives and themselves, and this is a way of setting that down for myself, it's like giving an account. [A3:138:3-14]

Doreen believes this is a fundamental process for people; "it's a way of being human" [A3:138:2-3].

Self-expression is important also as a means of working through confusion:

there's a word that I'm very fond of now thinking about it, called inchoate...it's that thing that certainly children experience before they've got language and you can experience it as an adult or growing up anyway before you've got the right word for the event, and you don't know what's happening... I think that state is a very important state for a lot of people... [A3:138:26-139:7]

Despite misgivings about the appropriateness of the word, Doreen characterises the process of writing through and out of this state as "therapeutic":

There's an element of, I was trying to get away

from, therapy as well... for me anyway. It might not be true of all people, but maybe if people started writing expressively earlier maybe they mightn't get into the bloody mess that I, you know the sort of confusion I was trying to express... earlier.

[A3:138:19-25]

Of poetry and prose, Doreen thinks that she "might find poetry easier for some reason and I think it's that there's less likely to be this thing about dialogue in it" [A3:124:20-23]. Writing dialogue she finds difficult. Another contributory factor, however, may be the complex and ambivalent relationship Doreen has to the act and art of story-telling. Her first connection with "stories" was through those told by her relatives in "the country". They are therefore linked with what is traditional in Ireland, parts of which she has come to reject. She does, however, see value in them in other ways, particularly in terms of building a relationship, firstly with her father, then with her son.

[Of her father] I think if there was any kind of an exchange between us that maybe I might have been telling him... stories [learnt at school], and we were exchanging information and so he was telling me his. [A3:89:1-6]

[Of her son] I remember it was good from the point of view of the relationship... [A3:134:17-19]

I told him stories... the ones I learned in school ... the sort of mythology and things... I remember

he said, well his girlfriend when he met her said that he told her, she's English right, he told her Irish fairystories, folkstories, things like that. So that even if I didn't learn them exactly at my mother's knee, I think learning them, no matter where you learn them from, it's good that you then pass them on... [A3:134:3-12]

Stories are therefore an important way of making connections, with the past and with other people. They also have another important function, that of conveying a message or moral and these may be either enabling or disabling, like the proper women of Annie M. P. Smithson. Whilst they may be a way of understanding a situation, they may also be a way of misrepresenting it. In an effort to gain more understanding, Doreen turned from stories to theory as a way of exploring her experience. She then realised, however, that things were not so simple; that the two were not exclusive:

I read books about theory... and I sort of like them, and I'd've said at one level I'm not interested in stories, and what's the whole point of stories right, life is to be lived and so on, and then I remember realising that we're telling each other stories all the time... [A3:140:21-26]

Doreen's search for a way of expressing her experience is made more complex by her relationship to Irish language and literature. As Ailbhe Smyth argues: "Nationality is

not, of course, the only sign of identity, but where the struggle to achieve it has been bitter and hard-fought, it cannot be assumed, never goes without saying" [Smyth 1989:8]. She can never ignore these issues. Her identity is marked by her being an Irish woman in England.

Moya Roddy records her experience of this position:

I fell into history: my own personal history; the history of my country and its relationship to England; and the history of language. [...]

Two languages. Irish English and English English. Both with completely different sets of assumptions, historical realities, attitudes, touchstones, etc., etc. [...]

Now I look for gaps between the two languages in order to escape. [1987:164&166]

Having been taught both English and Irish, Doreen potentially has access to three languages; Gaelic, Irish-English and "standard" English. The balance of power between these languages, however, is not equal. Writing of her dilemmas about modernising the French she spoke as a child, Nicole Ward Jouve writes, "How odd, to be learning one's own language as if it were a foreign language" [1990:19]. This is exactly the position in which many people of the Celtic nations find themselves. Frequently brought up in the language of the coloniser, they have later to attempt to learn the language that is their own.

Models of bilingualism tend to assume that the language of the coloniser is learnt second:

It is a characteristic irony that while the learning of languages can be an expensive business, nearly all those people in the world who grow up or become bilingual do so because their mother tongue or dialect has associations with poverty which make it likely to be thought inappropriate for education and some kinds of employment. [Miller 1983:8]

In Ireland, the Irish language does have associations with poverty, particularly for people in the Irish-speaking Gaeltacht areas, who felt that lack of fluency in English was an economic disadvantage [Brown 1981]. Doreen, like other children of her generation, was in the position of learning to write in Irish, whilst English was the language spoken at home. This led to a language division between school and home, compounding the cultural division.

Learning the oppressors' language first leads to the kind of discomfort recorded by James Joyce in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at

bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.

[1977:316]

Doreen generally writes in English, but prefers the sound of Irish: "the rhythm of Irish poetry's lovely, it's got a different metre to it... it's got a nice sound to it... I don't think English sounds all that well..." [A3:110:22-111:2]. Living in England has meant that she has not, until recently, had the opportunity to develop her proficiency in Irish. She did, however, decide to use the birth of her grandson as an occasion to try to use it again: "I tried, when my grandson was born I thought well now's the time to start writing little poems to him in Irish, my Irish isn't that good see, but I did write sort of small bits... mostly welcome..." [A3:127:18-21]

Bilingualism may be seen as a double heritage, a double opportunity, but it may also be a double burden, as Doreen discovered when she went to college:

because I'm Irish I felt I should've known about Joyce, and... I should know a lot of plays, and be a lot into some notion of story-telling in Ireland. I'm not, right. Because I'm in England, I should know all about like English and the literature...
[A3:107:17-22]

The choice of which language to write in is a part of constructing an identity as an Irish person. As Cairns and Richards [1990] point out, there has never been an

uncomplicated relationship between Irish people and "Irishness", which has had to be invented time and again from different social and political positions, though often through the medium of literature. Some women chose to reclaim the Irish language. Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill calls this writing in the "language of the mothers" [quoted in Meaney 1991:19].

Women's relationship to Irishness and Irish literature has particular difficulties. Janet Madden-Simpson [1984] points to the ways in which, despite the existence of Irish women writers and the important part they played in the literary Renaissance, Irish literature has been equated with a tradition of "great" male figures such as Yeats and Joyce, while women have been consigned to the role of metaphor:

The Aisling tradition of Gaelic poetry (in which Ireland is seen as a dream-vision of a beautiful young girl), the figures of Dark Rosaleen, Caithleen ni Houlihan and even the hag of Shan Van Vocht - all are traditional, conventional manifestations of the concept of Ireland as a passive female in distress, helpless and waiting for a male hero-figure to come and rescue her. [Madden-Simpson 1984:10]

Within these representations, Motherhood bears a particular burden. As Geradine Meaney argues "in Ireland, sexual identity and national identity are mutually dependent. The images of suffering Mother Ireland and the self-sacrific-

ing Irish mother are difficult to separate. Both serve to obliterate the reality of women's lives" [1991:3]. These images were frequently used by nationalist poets. Doreen remembers at school being taught the poetry of Padraig Pearse, the soldier-poet executed for his part in the 1916 uprising. His poems "The Mother" and "A Woman of the Mountains Keens Her Son" are examples of the romanticisation of suffering motherhood.

Writers are the sons of Mother Ireland:

Two forms of the myth of the (literary) hero predominate. He may be a "true son" of "Mother Ireland": this view has very much gone out of fashion. The current myth of the literary-subversive-in-exile (epitomised by Joyce) is no less masculine in its terms, however... for he too is a "son" escaping from the "nets" of "Mother" church, "Mother" Ireland and, perhaps, "Mother" tongue. [Meaney 1991:19]

Neither of these scenarios leaves space for a woman artist. This leaves women with a sense of the difficulties of becoming a writer under these conditions:

And it is not easy to write yourself up from under the closely meshed layers of the facts of femininity and Irishness. A woman in Irish literature, at least since the 18th century, is rarely attributed an independent existence. "The identity of 'woman' with a territory claimed by masculine power is still

deeply engrained" (Gerardine Meaney). [Smyth 1989:8]
I don't think there's anything been written at all
about Irish women. I suppose nobody ever bothered
about them. Well, in Ireland, women are ignored,
aren't they? [Noreen Hill in Lennon, McAdam &
O'Brien 1988:101]

Doreen would have been schooled on the first myth and
rebelled through the second, but is still left with the
need to create new stories. Coming to writing, therefore,
means coming to terms with the stories of her fathers,
biological and literary.

III Literary Sons and Daughters

The most important literary influence on both Doreen's life and her writing is James Joyce. Joyce's work itself is a diverse body, from the naturalism of Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man to the modernism of Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake. I propose to concentrate on the early Joyce, specifically on Dubliners and A Portrait, since these were the most significant for Doreen. Through the ways in which she talks about him, she demonstrates her particular understanding of the complex relationship between "stories" and "life".

The first contact Doreen had with Joyce was through reading as a teenager part of a copy of A Portrait that her sister had brought home. Like most of the books which came into the house, it was borrowed. Doreen describes it as "not of our house" [A3:84:11], which combines the senses of the lack of owned books with the alien nature of the ideas it expressed and the disapproval with which Joyce was viewed by many.

Around this time Doreen's sister, like many other young Irish people "was saving to go to America and she used to work in a shop where they sold sweets and tobacco and stuff like that but they also had a lending library in the shop" [A3:103:21-24]. Doreen would read some of the books she brought home, but did not enjoy them: "I just read them because they were something in print" [A3:104:2-3];

"I dunno quite what category to put them into, but they were misogynistic and stuff like that" [A3:103:25-27].

Again Doreen read them as stories with a particular message "and that is like don't step out of line"; "if anyone was going to get punished in the story it was going to be a woman..." [A3:104:6-7]. Although the framework for explaining the "messages" came later, Doreen said, "I can't remember any book that I read that gave me a good feeling" [A3:104:14-15]. This includes her first partial reading of A Portrait:

I mentioned about A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, that I think is an excellent book... but the bit I read was for me almost the worst bit of it, and it was to do with the whole area to do with guilt and that, and if I'd read on to the end, which I didn't, then... the whole story might've been different, my own story might've been different. I just happened to pick out the bit to do with his guilt about sexuality and stuff like that, and I don't think I was getting into that at that particular point, I wasn't old enough in some respects, but it sort of was teaching me in advance what to feel guilty about. As if the priests weren't already doing that from the pulpit, [L] you know. [A3:104:15-28]

The purpose of the part of the book to which Doreen refers is to demonstrate the ways in which young Catholic men are

made to feel guilty about their developing sexuality. Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist, has been having sex with prostitutes and is distressed and terrified by the sermons given by the Jesuit preachers at his school's annual retreat. Any sexual thought or practice is regarded as a mortal sin which leads to eternal damnation. The Hell to which sinners are sent is luridly described in passages several pages long:

And this terrible fire will not afflict the bodies of the damned only from without, but each lost soul will be a hell unto itself, the boundless fire raging in its very vitals. O, how terrible is the lot of those wretched beings! The blood seethes and boils in the veins, the brains are boiling in the skull, the heart in the breast glowing and bursting, the bowels a redhot mass of burning pulp, the tender eyes flaming like molten balls." [in Levin 1977:265]

Stephen becomes terrified and full of self-loathing. Read in isolation from the rest of the book, and especially detached from Stephen's flight at the end, this section becomes a reinforcement of the traditional Catholic view of sexuality. It tells the story of the fall of the sinner and the terrible, eternal punishment that befalls those who transgress the Church's teachings. It also tells the story of the righteous, providing the model on which real life stories should be based. There is a stark choice between absolute good and absolute evil.

It is the terms of this dichotomy which Stephen rejects later in the book. By not reading so far, however, Doreen was left with the dichotomy reinforced, not questioned or broken down. She recognises now that as Stephen's story came to be different by the end of the book, so could her own story have been had she read on and had different choices, models and discourses on sexuality opened up for her.

The themes of female identity, sexuality and religion are closely intertwined in both Dubliners and A Portrait. This happens in a specific way since Joyce's writing was simultaneously a product of, and a rebellion against, his Catholic upbringing and Jesuit education. There are a number of ways in which Joyce's portrayals of sexuality and of women can be read. These areas are contested, and there is no single feminist reading. As Henke and Unkeless point out in their introduction to Women and Joyce:

Critics have generally accepted Richard Ellman's assertion that women in Joyce's fiction consistently reflect the virgin/whore dichotomy in Western culture. Ellman argues that Joyce never transcended the Catholic urge to stereotype women as untouched virgins or defiled prostitutes... [1982:xii-xiii]

The authors and other writers in the collection argue, however, that this is a simplification.

In analysing what she conceptualises as the misogyny of A Portrait, Suzette Henke examines the section of the book

where one of Stephen's friends asks him if he would "deflower" a virgin. He responds ambiguously by rephrasing the question: "Is that not the ambition of most young gentlemen?" Henke argues that "figuratively, it is Stephen's ambition throughout the novel to 'deflower' the Blessed Virgin of Catholicism. He wants to supplant the Catholic Madonna with a profane surrogate, an aesthetic muse in sensuous reality" [1982:87].

He achieves this through the figure of the bird-girl:

A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea. She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and soft-hued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like feathering of soft white down. Her slateblue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and dovetailed behind her. Her bosom was as a bird's, soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some darkplumaged dove. But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder of mortal beauty, her face." [in Levin 1977:302-303]

In Joyce's writing, female figures serve both a realist and a symbolic purpose, as does their orientation toward

their sexuality. As Scott points out:

It is important to remember, however, that Joyce's sexual women are intended in part to serve a revolution of values that would overturn Catholic and Victorian England-inspired puritanism and help to counter-balance the male associated emphasis on reason. It is a role that moves women in Joyce beyond realism... [1984:203]

It is therefore unproductive to berate Joyce for failing to provide a model of liberated female sexuality, but far more useful to consider the ways in which his contradictory attitudes to women and the "Soul" as feminine position a female reader and the kinds of readings they facilitate. His simultaneous use and rejection of female stereotypes leaves women readers in an ambivalent position.

In Dubliners the female characters are confined by the sense of paralysis which blights all the characters' lives and is evaded only momentarily by the young boy in "The Sisters" and Gabriel Conroy in "The Dead". As with A Portrait, Doreen's relationship to this book developed over years:

I think probably my favourite book would be Dubliners... I remember reading that about 15 or so years ago... and finding it difficult to read... I read it and couldn't really relate to it, right, it seemed like strange notion of what Dublin is about. And yet something happened to change my mind about that, because I went back to reading it again over five

years ago, and wondering why I'd had that first impression... even if it's written around about the turn of the century right, it has a feel to it that's very like the feel I remember about Dublin, and like it could be that it's manufactured my feeling about Dublin, it could be that, but I think maybe it exposed, it brought home to me... the kind of life that was going on, that I didn't want to recognise, or couldn't, cos it's quite painful... it's a way of revealing I suppose... the nature of the place and the people, like the thing of not being able to do much about the situation and that.

[A3:109:8-110:2]

Again through Doreen's words comes the sense of the intermingling of life and stories. Her dilemma of whether her feelings about Dublin were manufactured or revealed by Joyce illustrates the complex ways in which our understandings of our selves and our origins change over time and the different readings which can be made of the same text according to those changes. The book when read a second time gave her a framework for understanding an aspect of the past which had earlier been too painful to consider, time and distance lending the detachment necessary for this shift.

Dubliners is a collection of fourteen stories which chronicle the personal and political life of Dublin. The characters which Doreen remembers best from her reading

are all from these stories and all suffer some kind of tragedy. The old priest in "The Sisters" loses his senses after dropping a chalice; in "Clay", some children play a trick on a poor relative; and Gabriel Conroy in "The Dead" is told by his wife of her previous love. Other characters portray either a grasping canniness or the inability to change their situation. The calculating woman in "A Mother" is the opposite of Pearse's suffering heroine. Eveline, in the story of that name, is about to leave Dublin with her fiance, but at the last minute stops, "her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal" [1977:44].

These images of passivity are contrasted with the development and finally the flight of the artist from the confines of his hometown in A Portrait, which Doreen describes as "an excellent book" [A3:104:16-17]. It resonates with meaning for anyone who has felt themselves to be different from those around them, or has left and learnt to think critically of their place of origin. It is particularly meaningful for Catholics who have questioned or rejected their religion.

Despite its stylistic and linguistic experimentation, A Portrait may still be described as a Bildungsroman; a novel of formation and education. It follows the life of the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus (Joyce), from his earliest childhood memories to the point at which he escapes into exile and the life of an artist. His differ-

ence marked by his own surname, Stephen feels apart from others even from his schooldays, and is isolated from the other boys. Doreen describes a similar sense of isolation:

I wasn't all that friendly with any of the girls in the school. I had one friend, Deirdre, and I don't know quite why we got on but she was always nice to me, put it that way. The rest were a bit [...] the attitude in the school encouraged what I call sort of sneakiness and tale telling... and all manner of you know, nastiness... so I didn't really like a lot of the girls in the school for good, like for very good reasons, and they didn't approve of me either.

[A3:102:7-16]

Although from the middle class, Stephen's increasing poverty, like Doreen's, also serves to set him apart from his peers.

At one level, therefore, Stephen (and Joyce) is available to Doreen as a model of a writer. His is a "universal" story of flight from poverty and narrow-mindedness into artistic freedom. On other levels, however, a female reader is placed in an ambivalent position since the author and the myths he appropriates and creates are available only to men. Karen Lawrence analyzes the ways in which gender is inscribed throughout the book:

although Stephen rejects his biological father, he accepts the dynastic power of paternity. Stephen disowns Simon Dedalus only to invoke the power of the "old father, old artificer" Daedalus, whose

legacy will in turn enable him to become the father of his race and "forge its uncreated conscience". Metaphors of paternity, inheritance, privilege and authority are at the heart of the novel, charting Stephen's fundamental attempt to understand "himself, his name and where he was." [1986:32]

In Greek mythology, the name Daedalus was derived from the word daidalos, meaning "cunningly wrought" or "skilfully worked". He was a craftsman, inventor, architect and builder of the Labyrinth. His statues were said to appear human. When King Minos of Crete refused to let him leave the island, he built wings of wax and feathers so that he and his son could escape. It was Icarus who, ignoring his father's warnings, flew too close to the sun and with melted wings crashed into the sea. It is Daedalus, the "old artificer" Stephen invokes at the end of the book, leaving open the question of whether he will fly successfully or fall.

Two themes are important here; paternity and flight. In A Portrait words and narratives are always associated with the paternal:

Simon Dedalus offers his son's first rhetorical model in the story-telling at the opening of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. [...] By making "Baby Tuckoo" or Stephen the subject or centre of his narrative, Simon encourages the self-centred, egotistical, solipsistic narrative so

obvious throughout Stephen's artistic development. The early story-telling is one of a series of vignettes where Stephen witnesses a performance, a personal or political discourse by his father, and is moved to sort out his own personal history and eventually his artistic discourse. [Scott 1987:47-48]

His next rhetorical models are provided by the Jesuit "fathers" who were his educators. Later, his aesthetic theory is worked out by reference to the various "fathers" of the Catholic Church, such as Aquinas and Newman, and Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, his dual heritage. At the end of the book he turns from his Catholic to his Classical fathers; from his biological to his mythological father.

Concomitant with this process, Stephen "feels compelled to reject all three 'mothers' - physical, spiritual and political. [...] The image of woman metonymically absorbs all the paralyzing nets that constrain the artist" [Henke 1982:97]. Critics such as Suzette Henke and Florence Howe have noted the association of the (male) artist with flight, with swallows, while the women are earth bound or associated with water-birds, like the young woman whose image Stephen appropriates for his muse.

Women readers of A Portrait are therefore able to identify with the artist/protagonist, whilst also being positioned as that which he rebels against, that which it is necess-

ary to reject in order to become an artist. Despite these difficulties, however, Doreen says that "I have some notion, again a bit of a fantasy... of all the people, like Joyce would be sort of the model for me" [A3:130:23-25]. As she continues, however, it becomes clear that admiration for another writer, while providing inspiration, can also be disabling. Her difficulty in finding words to express herself indicate her sense of unworthiness in claiming Joyce in this way: "I hope I'm not conceited... it sounds conceited, writing like Joyce..." [A3:131:11-12]. She continues

a few times now I've thought there's no point in writing, cos Joyce has said it all right, about the kind of interests I have right, that is Dublin and religion and Ireland and all that sort of stuff, and you know, getting away from it." [A3:130:27-131:5]

In Silences, Tillie Olsen writes of "The overwhelmingness of the dominant. The knife of the perfectionist attitude" [Olsen 1978:253]. Since I cannot be the genius Joyce was, runs the disabling logic, there is no point in writing at all. And yet there is a point, a crucial point, which Doreen makes:

he's male right, and I thought... a woman hasn't written that story and maybe if I could do it slightly, I don't say do it differently, use him as a sort of jumping off point... but describe my experiences then that mightn't be a bad idea, cos I don't know who else is doing it. [A3:131:5-10]

Here gender is acknowledged as important in structuring experience. Differences between women are recognised too. That she and Edna O'Brien share their gender is insufficient to bridge the gap between her reality and Doreen's:

Edna O'Brien's sort of written about Ireland and that and there's a lot in what she writes that I can recognise but... although she writes about Dublin... she's got a different perspective and there's an element of social class as well. [A3:131:13-19]

The difference that class and gender make to writing may be illustrated by way of reference to one of Doreen's poems, "Shawl". The feeling of the poem organises itself around a central image of snowfall. The image of snow has an important role in Joyce's "The Dead", the final story in the Dubliners collection and Doreen's favourite. The main protagonist, Gabriel Conroy, lies in bed at the end of the story and reaches a moment of insight, a recognition of his own shortcomings which enables growth. The falling snow at this moment has been taken as an image of unity:

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westwards. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly

upon the Bog of Allen and, further westwards, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. [in Levin 1977: 173]

Snow also plays apart in the imagery of Edna O'Brien's The Country Girls. The heroine, Kathleen, has a liking for Joyce and literary pretensions her friend, Baba, is quick to dismiss: "I had written one or two poems since I came to Dublin. I read them to Baba and she said they were nothing to the ones in mortuary cards." [1960:151] Earlier in the book, after her mother has died and she has gone to convent boarding school, Kathleen has a "romantic" encounter with a married man from her village, known as Mr. Gentleman. In the Christmas holidays he offers her a lift to Limerick and during the journey, snow begins to fall:

We drove along the Limerick road and while we were driving it began to snow. Softly the flakes fell. Softly and obliquely against the windscreen. It fell on the hedges and on the trees behind the hedges, and on the treeless fields in the distance, and

slowly and quietly it changed the colour and the shape of things, until everything outside the motor-car had a mantle of white soft down. [1960:99]

In both these cases, the hero/heroine is able to philosophically contemplate and enjoy the beauty of the snow because of their position in a warm and secure interior; a hotel bedroom or an expensive car.

The starting point for Doreen's poem was the last scene of "The Dead". In a note accompanying the poem she wrote:

Years ago I read "The Dead" which closes on snowfall. As I read it I imagined the final discussion taking place in one of the bedrooms where I grew up, and "Shawl" is viewed from that room - long since demolished." [Letter 11/4/89]

In interview Doreen elaborated on the difference in meaning snow had for her bedroom, to what it could mean to Gabriel Conroy, Kathleen or their creators:

one of the things I remember about Ireland was when you woke up and there'd been a snowfall. We just had one upstairs, no we didn't, it was three upstairs windows in our house, but the particular one I used to look out of was on to the back yard, and the snow, seeing the snow there and I knew right, that even if it looked nice, you couldn't feel good about it cos your shoes leaked and you got cold and there was a pay-off to this lovely scene. [A3:123:3-11]

The poem itself follows this pattern of thought. It begins

with the softness of an overnight snowfall, linking the falling flakes to the ticking of the clock. In the light of morning, the fallen snow is compared to a shawl, worn by working-class women for warmth and protection. The beauty of the drifted shapes, the frost and icicle formations is noted. Then by midday the melt begins, likened to the unravelling of the cloth of the shawl. The gentleness is over and the imagery changes from comfortable and domestic to become more threatening. In the last stanza the real meaning of the snow is revealed as the melted water begins to drip through the ceiling into a bucket. Now it is the sound of the dripping water which is likened to the ticking clock; they "Beat time / Each with a drummer's zeal". The sound is now relentless and antagonistic. The illusion of beauty is over and grim reality revealed.

A similar strategy is used in the poem "Harvest Moon", where a painterly description of the moon in autumn ends with its location fixed "Between the gas works and Boland's flour mill", important features in the landscape of working-class Dublin, but rarely placed in lyrical poetry.

The influence of Joyce is inscribed in Doreen's writing in other, more nebulous ways. The lesson in the story of that name refers to the meaning of words, the ways in which a child's learning of language is intimately connected with her position in society. The girl in the story learns the

meaning of two words, "sack" and "eddy". The second word brings the pleasure of a new piece of knowledge, but the first only relief that her worst fears were not realised: "She imagined him covered up, fastened inside the sack, then her fear grew that they would take him away" [Lesson :1]. Instead her father stays more at home, and it was during a trip to the Unemployment Exchange that she learnt the second word. The overall lesson of the time, however, was "bitter"; "to keep a sense of balance, inner and outer life must be kept in agreement and to do that, one's reflection was continually curbed" [Lesson:2].

Joyce's sense of paralysis echoes through this story of people making their inner life fit the outer one that they have no power to change. It is felt also in the poem "School", where "no one asked" why the statue of the Virgin Mary depicts her standing on a crescent moon. The untitled poem 6 is most clearly about self-imposed paralysis, and how violent feelings when damned eventually break out. This is seen as a kind of liberation: "Senses freed, with no need of a wall."

Other poems recall Doreen's visual artistry. In interview she often uses the word "descriptions" to explain what she feels she is doing with her writing and in "trying to give a flavour of what it was like" [A3:87:2] at various times in her life. This relates to the Irish folktales she was read at school, since they are known for their descriptive power [Jackson 1971]. She often gives a word-picture, as

in "Days", "Harvest Moon" and "Shawl". Colour and the quality of the light are of central importance to the imagery of "School", and the sky, framed by the school room windows is described as a "canvas".

Poems 1, 2 and 3 recall an image from childhood, of a group of friends playing on a beach. The third, however, returns to Doreen's concern with language, as the "approved lines" prevent the children from learning the truth. By using incidents from her own childhood, Doreen is able to use the child as a symbol for her feeling of being "inchoate":

I think it's that thing that certainly children experience before they've got language, and you can experience it as an adult or growing up anyway before you've got the right word for an event, and you don't know what's happening... you can't easily describe it. And I think that state is a very important state for a lot of people, and I'm sure a lot of people go through it. [A3:139:1-8]

An important part of the feeling of control which Doreen values in the writing process, therefore, comes from the ability to find the words for previously unnamed experiences.

Notes

1) Primary school teachers, for example, had to attend all-Irish preparatory schools from the age of 12, before progressing to teacher training college [Rudd 1988].

The Lesson

The conversation became consolatory. There was less laughter to be heard. When they spoke, they gathered close together, and, from the hushed tones, the focus of their talk emerged. It was that her father was to get the sack.

They were talking about the sack. She would stand outside the small knot of grown-ups trying to undo the puzzle in her mind, and, as the weeks passed, she understood that someone was going to put her daddy in a sack.

She imagined him covered up, fastened inside the sack, and then her fear grew that they would take him away. There was no-one to talk to.

As time went on, she was relieved that he didn't leave - rather he was more than ever at home. So that was what the sack meant. You stayed at home. Mammy went out to work instead, and Daddy looked after the children. She liked it. He looked after them (her baby brother and her) carefully. Once she heard him curse when he burnt the carrots.

Early on, he took her and her brother to the labour exchange. They crossed the city, her daddy wheeling the push-chair while she walked alongside. They joined the queue of men waiting outside the heavy closed doors. They wore caps, and her daddy wore a hard hat. There was a

light wind which blew some dust around in a corner near the door. "That's called an eddy", her father said. "An eddy", she echoed, then, "like...?" "Nelson Eddy", he said encouragingly, and they both smiled, pleased.

When the doors were opened, the men formed a line inside, whilst she stayed out in the sun minding her brother. She looked down at the swirling dust particles and thought, "an eddy", feeling the word turn around in her head.

On their way home, they rested awhile on the underground air-raid shelters in the Custom House grounds.

There were to be some other bright moments in the next five years, but overall the lesson was a bitter one. The lesson one had to learn was that to keep a sense of balance, inner and outer life must keep in agreement and to do that, one's reflection was continually curbed.

2

We all knew it was the triumph of good over evil,
But no one ever explained why she also stood - in part -
On a crescent moon.
No one asked.

Shawl

A curtain of falling snow
Dapples the evening air
Muting the city sounds
Dimming the gas-lamp's stare.

Inside the clock is wound
And the sounds of the house die down.

The gleam of morning light
Shows off the winter shawl
Layered through out the night
Left by the soft snow-fall.

Spread over small back-yards
Covering flags and setts
Pleated over a stack of slates which
Last summer, the builder left.

A frost filigree has formed
Near to the water trough.
Crisp, carefully measured folds
Cover the closet roof

And round the walls
An icicle fringe hangs still
While the clock tictocs away
Face down on the window sill.

By noon the yellow gleam
Makes holes in the ravelled cloth;
Unpicks the parting seam
Revealing the line of moss.

From the growing patch on the ceiling
(Winter's ominous sign
Of water in the roof-space)
Drops a wet plumb line,
Rippling the rising surface,
Filling the metal pail,
While it and the facedown clock
Beat time,
Each with a drummer's zeal.

1) Days

(Sandymount, 1946)

In the dairy-cool tower
With crumbling stone footholds
We sheltered when sudden brisk squalls came our way

Whilst the wind whisked the waves
On the turning-tide-water
To a froth
In the earthenware crock of the bay.

2)

In the high-ringing tower
(It's upper floor missing),
We played cops and robbers
One mid-summer day.

Outside in bright sunshine,
The light-fingered ebb-tide
Made off with the gems
Through the arms
Of the bay.

3)

Stone-bounded,
Smooth, rounded,
Unfocussed,
They
Moved soft as shadows
In unworded play,

Then spoke
Approved lines
Cribbed from quickly flicked scripts
Which shaded their eyes
From the light of day.

4) Harvest Moon

The fog-smell of Autumn
Before Winter's chill,
Through damp, yellow air
(I picture it still)
A moon like the Sun,
Its craters and rilles
Smudged lines on pale orange,
Beyond the Earth's veil,
Between the gasworks and Boland's flour mill.

5)

Thin-skinned and silent,
Was it the lack
Of sturdy robustness
Dogging my track
Strengthened the links
Of a near-broken chain
Hauling me back
To that Loneliness, pain,

Then, letting me go
Again and again.

6)

Hands clasped to eyes, ears and mouths,
We are the wise ones. We crouch
Close to the wall to feel free,
Shunning all evil, we three.

Keeping good counsel, our way
Is to stay within bounds; obey
Laws that other wise ones demand,
That order may stay in our land.

Still in our uncertain world,
Through to our bones comes the thud
Of life being felled. Without shame
We agree. They've only themselves to blame.

Crouched in our fear-filled state,
The poundings reverberate.
It's our heartbeat, we allege
And bid it be still in its cage.

From an unknown source
The smell comes, gathers force.
We choke our own nausea down,
Heaving to keep control, calm.

Reality always returns
Forcing our stomachs to churn.
You cry out - pass new laws to hold down

The feelings we'd dearly disown.

The violent eruption starts.

Foul, bitter vomit runs fast.

Relieved, we cannot contain

All the evil. It pours out again

This time down

Our bodies, legs, feet;

Spreading, your evil to meet

We strike out - breast, butterfly, crawl.

Senses freed, with no need of a wall.

Chapter 7: "A Writing Sort of Person"

I Childhood

Marsha was born in Manchester in 1961 of Jamaican parents, and brought up in Rhodes near Middleton, an almost exclusively white area. Her family consequently led a life fairly isolated from the Black community. Neither of her parents were "avid readers" [A4:144:19], although her father always took a daily newspaper, and her mother occasionally read in bed. There were, therefore, few books and magazines around the house, although those that were there became an important resource for Marsha:

we didn't sort of have shelves or anything like this [indicates her own bookshelves] around the house but I remember we did have this huge pile of books that just lived in a big bag underneath the... hot water system in my Mum's bedroom which I used to delve through now and then but that's about it. [A4:144:23-145:3]

Marsha does not remember her parents reading to her:

Because I don't remember it, I think they probably didn't. I mean I remember the first book I ever had was just a little book of fairytales and I mean I only ever remember reading that to myself so I assume that you know, most of the reading that I actually did I just picked up for myself. [A4:145:13-18]

Her mother, however, was influenced by the rich oral culture of Jamaica:

my Mum is... a real great character in terms of telling stories and, you know, if you just say, "Oh, tell me about the time when" she'll go on, she could probably go on for hours and is a really interesting person to listen to... I think it's also because she is a lot, lot older than I am and so life was very, very different when she was young and you know just because when she was a child you didn't have TVs and I don't think they had a radio either at first or anything like that, so you know, the way you entertain yourself is by talking and probably she's got a lot of that from there as well. [A4:146:8-20]

Marsha's interest in and appreciation of her mother's story-telling, however, is something which has developed over time, although she acknowledges the influence it has always had:

I think [the conscious questioning is] something that has happened as I've got older, not so much when I was small. Although you know she has like big things that have happened in her life that she has told us about and which you know, which have sort of stayed with me and which I think she probably told us about when I was quite small. [A4:146:24-147:1]

Living in a predominantly white area meant that starting school was more of an ordeal than it was for the other

children:

the only other Black people at school were my sisters who were, you know, just a little bit older than I was. I remember the first day at school which was absolutely awful and I think that that is probably a lot to do with the fact that you know as a Black child you become very self-conscious once you start... hitting society and finding out what racism's all about. [A4:147:19-26]

This experience was shared by other Black children, as Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe show in The Heart of the Race, their study of Black women's lives in Britain:

My parents were born in Trinidad, but I went to school in Newcastle... The only Black people I came into contact with was my family. The area we used to live in when I was small was very rough. People didn't call me names though. It was only when I got older that I felt it. My first experience was when I was in primary school. [Bryan, Dadzie & Scafe 1985 :228]

Joan Riley has fictionalised the experiences of many isolated Black children in her novel The Unbelonging, the first book by a Black British woman to be published by one of the feminist presses:

Hyacinth had been at Beacon Girls' Secondary School for only two months. Being one of only eight Black children, she had become the butt of many jokes, taunts and cruel tricks. Normally the breaks between

lessons were the greatest nightmares of the school day, to be approached with apprehension, and endured when they finally arrived. [Riley 1985:12]

Marsha was, however, for the most part able to enjoy school: "But I mean eventually when I settled down I think I was quite happy at school... probably because the things that we did there I enjoyed doing" [A4:147:26-28]. This enjoyment, coupled with academic success, continued for several years until Marsha became disillusioned with school. She sums up her school career as follows:

Well when I was very small I think I just enjoyed everything, you know because I just enjoyed playing around and being with other children I think. As I got older... I think English was my favourite subject and I liked sports, and as I got older still I think the things I didn't like were... physics and chemistry, and as I got older still I didn't like school at all [L]. [A4:148:3-10]

I started off being very good, and I think I could've been a brilliant student but... I just decided I wasn't really bothered about it and stopped doing anything. [A4:148:26-149:2]

One factor influencing this decision was the attitude of the teachers she encountered. Despite "regularly [coming] top of the class" [A4:149:3] Marsha does not remember being encouraged academically by the staff:

I don't recall that you know, they were especially

encouraging except where sports are concerned. But I mean any Black child who shows the slightest bit of interest in sport is gonna be really encouraged, and I mean that is the only area really in which I feel I was really encouraged, even in the days before I reached secondary school... when I was seven or eight at school I was even, you know, allowed to miss classes and stuff so I could run around the yard... which is all very nice, you know, in terms of "Oh great, I got off this lesson", but I don't think that's... the correct way to go about things.

[A4:149:12-25]

Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe place this type of experience within the institutionalised and personal racism of the British school system, illustrating their point with testimony from other women and describing the ways in which

we were [thought to be] good at sports - physical, non-thinking activities- an ability which was to be encouraged so that our increasing 'aggression' could be channeled into more productive areas.

In the first form, they found out that I was good at sport. They had the Triple A's Award scheme and I beat everyone. I became district champion for that year. Then they decided that I could win all the medals for them. But one day, during some special Sports event, I was talking to my friend and

missed the race when they were calling me onto the track. It was horrible for me, after that. Because I'd missed the race, the teacher wouldn't have me back in his classes! I decided then and there that I'd had enough of running, but they never stopped trying to coax me back. [Bryan, Dadzie & Scafe 1985:66]

The disparaging attitude of their schools to Black children's ambitions leaves many with an ambivalent attitude to education. In 1972 Sue Sharpe interviewed 51 girls of West Indian origin in a survey of 249 4th form female pupils from four schools in Ealing. Despite the racist assumptions which mar parts of this work, some of her conclusions are still applicable today. Sharpe found that:

The girls' own response to education is ambivalent. They feel the boredom and irrelevance of school as much as the white girls, but at the same time they place more emphasis on the importance of qualifications and of education itself. [1976:252]

[All the girls] are in their own way trying to grasp a changing sense of the feminine role. ... For the West Indian girls it involves striving for more freedom and understanding and demanding something more out of life than the continuous struggle faced by their mothers and grandmothers. [1976:300]

Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, however, are quicker to pinpoint the racism that provokes this ambivalence:

All I wanted to do was to become an air hostess, but the teachers said I wouldn't be able to do that because I wasn't clever enough. This hadn't seemed to bother them when I was missing classes to train though. One teacher told me I would never amount to anything and would be better off cleaning the streets... [1985:67]

They never encouraged you or asked you what you would like to do when you leave school. I had always been made to feel that because I was Black, I was stupid and not good enough for much. [1985:68]

The educational successes and career aspirations of Black girls, despite the structural and personal racism they encounter, has since been documented by Heidi Safia Mirza [1992].

Marsha's favourite subject at school was English, the discipline within which many of these racist attitudes and assumptions are inscribed. Few of the books she read at school made a lasting impression, but given the dates through which she attended school it is possible to speculate that those books are likely to have been peopled mainly by white characters, with disparaging asides made about Black characters, from golliwogs to savages. The language in which they are written is permeated with racist references to white as innocent, pure, beautiful and good, while black is evil, ugly and frightening:

Children were presented with a world view in which blackness represented everything that was ugly, uncivilised and underdeveloped, and our teachers made little effort to present us or our white classmates with an alternative view. [Bryan, Dadzie & Scafe 1985:66]

The first book Marsha remembers, also the first book which was given to her as a present, was a book of fairy stories:

it wasn't like the sort of fairy tale books that you can get today where you know, you get all sorts of different people portrayed in all kinds of different ways... it was just like a fairytale book with stuff like Rapunzel in. I think that's probably the story that I remember best and oh, Snow White has got to be there I reckon. [L] I mean I'm not really sure exactly what I made of them at the time but I must have enjoyed them to have you know kept the book so long. [A4:160:13-22]

Much of the work on fairy stories and their functions in children's lives assumes that their role is a positive one and their influence beneficial for children's psychological growth. In these works "the child" is assumed as a kind of "ideal reader" rather than historically and culturally placed, and the kind of reading which can be made is described as a function of the text, rather than as due to the interaction between reader, text and

context. In these accounts the assumption is made that the child is white and no attempt is made to analyse the responses of a Black child coming to terms with a symbolic world in which all the human characters are white and the symbolism itself permeated by a black/white dichotomy.

Grace Nichols notes that as

children we grew up with the biblical associations of white with light and goodness, black with darkness and evil. We feasted on that whole world of Greek myths, European fairy-tales and legends, princes and princesses, Snowhites and Rapunzels. I'm interested in the psychological effects of this on Black people even up to today, and how it functions in the minds of white people themselves. [in Ngcobo 1988:101]

Bob Dixon argues that

Children's literature, especially that intended for very small children, gives rise to particularly difficult problems as it more often works on a symbolic and unconscious level. It's difficult to combat racism instilled in this way by argument, as small children aren't able to cope with the necessary ideas. It's only possible to combat such racism effectively through literature for children which embodies civilised attitudes carried at the same emotional and symbolic level. [1976:95]

Dixon is concerned with the "psychological destruction" [1976:95] caused by racist attitudes and imagery in children's fiction and introduces sociological and psychological evidence of the damage done to children's self-image. Judith Stinton refers to the "harmful attitudes" [1979:3] which may be housed in books and Rae Alexander spells out the nature of that harm: "Despite the growing number of books depicting the black experience, the image they give of the black American is still one of the more insidious influences that hinder the Black child from finding true self-awareness" [1979:70].

What is lacking in these, and other, analyses, however, is any concept of children as "resisting readers" [Fetterley 1978] or any consideration of the pleasures children manage to wrest from the unlikeliest of texts. Marsha's answer makes it clear that the adult thinking back has a very different perspective to the child reader.

Gemma Moss [1989] contends that anti-sexist and anti-racist perspectives argue for the importance of texts in the construction of identity, but in a way which positions girls and Black children as "victims" of texts and white boys as having an untroubled and affirmative relationship with them. Instead of this it is important to investigate the ways in which all children actively make meaning from the texts they read and through the writing they do. In "Amarjit's Song", Carolyn Steedman provides evidence of the ways in which one Asian girl, using a children's story

influenced by the European folktale tradition, was able to "occupy, take hold of, and transform the set of symbols that she encountered; for what she found there was most profoundly herself" [1992:100].

This is not to argue, however, that racist, sexist and classist imagery in books has no effect. As Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe argue:

From the earliest Janet and John readers onwards, we found ourselves either conspicuous by our absence or depicted as a kind of joke humanity, to be ridiculed or pitied but never regarded as equals. Right across the curriculum and at every level, the schools' textbooks confirmed that Black people had no valid contribution to make to the society, other than to service its more menial requirements. [1985:66]

In literary terms, the world Marsha lived in was white. This was also true for the books kept at home, with one exception "and that had to be a religious book, but it was about this, in fact it was about the only Black saint I've ever heard of, right, called St. Martin, and it was just a book about his life story" [A4:151:23-26]. (2)

The only book which Marsha remembers being required to read at school is John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men. This supposedly universal story of human nature includes only a stereotypical depiction of a "subservient" Black worker and the "loose" wife of the boss's son. It is reading

experiences like this which have contributed to calls for more Black literature to be taught in schools. Many of the young women interviewed by Audrey Osler [1989] and Suzanne Scafe [1989] agreed that they wanted there to be more literature by Black and Asian authors on the school curriculum. Scafe is cautious in her response to this, however, arguing that the introduction of Black texts without appropriate planning and consideration, may do more harm than good, given Black pupils' ambivalent responses to schools, teachers and their own culture and languages. What is required in order to make the use of Black literature a positive experience is a change in the theory and methods of teaching all literature.

English at school of course involves writing as well as reading. Marsha felt that while she received no special encouragement, even when doing well, neither did any of her classmates; the dynamics of this situation thus being predominantly those of class, rather than gender or race:

I don't think that I was particularly encouraged, but then I don't think that anyone was, and I think that's really to do with the way that schools operate and the way that teachers work. I don't feel that they have, I mean that most teachers that is, don't really have any genuine interest in the job that they're doing or in the children. [A4:150:2-7]

Despite this lack of encouragement, however, Marsha remembers some positive experiences. She recalls writing

essays, and also some poetry:

I do remember once though when we had to write a poem and... I wrote this poem, which just goes to show right, how religion, God, how religion influences you. But I just went away and got the Bible... cos I decided I wanted to write a poem about Samson and Delilah, which is a very interesting story... I was really pleased cos the teacher gave me ten out of ten and... it wasn't the first time I'd got ten out of ten, but I didn't think the poem was that good really, you know [L] so I was quite pleased with that. [A4:152:19-153:2]

While still at school, Marsha did read for pleasure:

I'm sure I did. I mean I don't specifically remember doing a lot, but I'm sure that I must have because... I remember my brothers used to say - cos they again were much older than me - I'd be sort of sitting reading in the evening and they'd say, "You're gonna need glasses before you're 21". [L]
[A4:150:25-151:4]

Although she does not remember specifically what she did read, Marsha is certain it did not include magazines. As a child she read the occasional Beano, but was never interested in magazines aimed at young girls or teenagers: "I didn't go for those, I remember my sister used to get that Twinkle, [L] which wasn't really my cup of tea" [A4:151:14-16].

Outside school, Marsha also wrote for pleasure: "I used to write bits and pieces of things and just keep them, and I know I used to keep a diary as well" [A4:153:14-15]. Both reading and writing were solitary pleasures, since neither her brothers and sisters nor her friends had a particular interest, though one of her sisters did win a prize in a local newspaper competition, and one sister was interested in art, spending part of her time drawing.

II Adulthood

For Marsha, however, leaving school did not mean abandoning the idea of acquiring an education for herself. She later returned to college twice, gaining O and A levels, and earning a place at university, where she gained a degree in American Studies. Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe argue that this is not an uncommon experience for Black women:

Returning to study has never been easy, but the large number of Black women of all ages who have chosen to do so attests to the fact that we are still refusing to be deterred by our lack of qualifications, the demands of our families and other pressures. [1985:82]

Marsha has also held a number of jobs, including service station attendant, bar worker, teaching women's self-defence, working in a bookshop and as a health education adviser.

As an adult, Marsha's reading has been fairly eclectic, especially during the time she worked in the bookshop:

I find it really hard to sort of say, "I like this type of book and I don't like that", because you know, you might just pick up a book and it's you know, might not be fiction, but it's something that you've never read anything about before and you just read it because it's interesting. [A4:155:24-156:2]

Staff discount at the shop allowed her to build up the

library she now has, but also meant that she has a stockpile of unread material:

when I left the shop I just did this massive swoop because you know, whilst I was there I was allowed to get a third off books right. I just bought a load... mainly Black writers, some poetry books, a few novels. [A4:155:18-23]

I've decided now that I can't buy any more books because I've bought so many... loads of which I haven't read and I'll probably never read them unless you know, I don't know, I live to be a very old woman. [L] [A4:155:11-15]

Finding time to read is a real problem for Marsha as she balances a full-time job, shared child-care responsibilities and the desire to write.

The only specific genre of literature which Marsha particularly mentioned was autobiography, and some of the other novels and films which were important to her have a largely autobiographical content. The first book which she talked about was Audre Lorde's The Cancer Journals

which I thought was a really good book and- although I wouldn't agree... [with] I think it was Adrienne Rich who said that every woman should read it. I'm not sure about that... But it's a good book though... it's the sort of thing that just raises all sorts of issues that you haven't really thought about before and might not think about. [A4:156:6-13]

Working from the premise that "women with breast cancer are warriors" [1985:52] Lorde uses extracts from her journals written at the time to examine the meaning of breast cancer and mastectomy in women's lives. Believing that silence is worse than fear, and that it works to keep women divided and therefore powerless, she exposes the sham of prosthesis, the sexist and heterosexist assumptions on which the idea is based, and the "cancer industry" which promotes their use. Women's grieving and self-exploration are cut short under the maxim that "you'll be the same as before", while difference is hidden, largely for the comfort of others, allowing the capitalist patriarchal system which creates the environment which causes these largely preventable cancers to go unchallenged:

For instance, what would happen if an army of one-breasted women descended upon Congress and demanded that the use of carcinogenic, fat-stored hormones in beef fat be outlawed? [1985:8]

The insistence upon breast prosthesis as 'decent' rather than functional is an additional example of the wipe-out of self in which women are constantly encouraged to take part. [1985:56]

Despite the pain inscribed in its pages and the anger purposefully directed at a system which so damages women's health, The Cancer Journals is a life-affirming and empowering book. In "The Unicorn is Black: Audre Lorde in Retrospect", Joan Martin contends that it

affords all women who wish to read it the opportunity to look at the life experience of one very brave woman who bared her wounds without shame, in order that we might gain some strength from sharing in her pain. [1985:288]

Sandi Russell argues that Lorde's experience of cancer has informed her poetic writings and acknowledges the strength that The Cancer Journals gives to women sharing Lorde's position:

In this painful and honest account of her battle with, and final triumph over, the disease, which included a mastectomy, Lorde rejects the illusory media images of women. By confronting her own fear and anger and in finally accepting difference, Audre Lorde inspires and gives courage to thousands of women in similar circumstances. [1990:160]

A woman does not, however, have to share Lorde's situation in order to gain strength from and be challenged by her book. She puts the politics back into a situation which is usually regarded as an individual plight and challenges the sense of hopelessness frequently surrounding cancer. She breaks the silence on the important topic of prosthesis and, as Marsha acknowledges, raises issues rarely discussed elsewhere, providing a thought-provoking read. The themes of self-acceptance and acceptance of difference may also be meaningful for many women.

Marsha also talks of liking the autobiographical works of Maya Angelou. These books cover Angelou's life from her girlhood, through her many careers, to her years in Africa, searching for a Black homeland and her return to America to work for the Organisation of Afro-American Unity. Angelou is a remarkable woman who has lived through an amazing variety of life experiences and achieved a great deal. Unfortunately this has meant that much of the critical work on her writing (particularly her autobiographical prose) has taken the form of praise for her life and work, rather than an appreciation and critique of her means of recording it.

Maya Angelou was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1928 and spent most of her childhood in Stamps, Arkansas, where she and her brother Bailey were sent to live with their Grandmother Henderson when their parents' marriage broke down. The children returned briefly to live with their mother in California, but after Maya was raped by her mother's boyfriend she became mute and returned to Stamps with Bailey. Mrs. Bertha Flowers, the "aristocrat" of the local Black community, encouraged Maya's love of literature and helped heal her wounds. Later in their teens, Grandmother Henderson sends Maya and Bailey back to California to escape the worst consequences of Southern white prejudice. In order to convince herself that she is not a lesbian, Maya initiates a sexual encounter with the best looking youth she can find, and this experience leaves her pregnant. At sixteen she leaves home to take up

the adult burden of supporting herself and her son.

Since that time she has been a waitress, a short-order cook, worked at a variety of manual jobs, served in a record store, been a prostitute, run a brothel, sung, danced, acted, been a journalist, an editor and an administrator. In the 1950s she toured Europe and Africa as a member of the cast of Porgy and Bess. In New York she joined the Harlem Writers' Guild and has since produced plays, sketches, a libretto, screenplays and several volumes of poetry. In the 1960s she joined the rising tide of Black activism, becoming Northern Co-ordinator for Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Council, although later her political allegiance shifted towards the radicalism of Malcolm X. In All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes, she chronicles her stay in Africa, her search for its "heart" and for her own homeland, which she came to realise, for better or worse, is America. Throughout this time she had a variety of relationships and friendships, and has been married several times.

It is not surprising therefore that most writing on Angelou's autobiography focus on the remarkable nature of her life history:

There are few autobiographies that read with such depth and articulation. We must stop and remind ourselves that yes, this is a life, not a fiction. And it is Maya's life of strength, love and determination that we can use as a mirror to judge our

own. [Russell 1990:137]

Maya Angelou, dancer, singer, writer and poet is a woman who has realised her own power. A Black "shero" of our times. [Pollard 1984:115]

Angelou's achievements are recognised as all the more remarkable for her unpromising start in life and she is seen as a spokesperson for all others from her community who never found a voice: "With immense power and creativity, the 'silenced' voice of a little black girl is now heard throughout the world" [Russell 1990:142].

The major critical work on Angelou is Dolly McPherson's Order Out of Chaos. In her foreword to this book Eleanor Traylor outlines the purpose of both Angelou's life and her art, which is "the creation and recreation of a self struggling to achieve coherence amid the contradictions of desire (human nature) and custom (tradition and law)" [McPherson 1991:xi]. McPherson places Angelou's work in the tradition of African-American autobiography, which dates as far back as the earliest slave narratives, and delineates their thematic continuity:

The central themes to be culled from I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings and that recur throughout the autobiography are courage, perseverance, the persistence or renewal of innocence against overwhelming obstacles, and the often difficult process of attaining selfhood. [1991:12]

There is also the larger theme of "transformation (often

through transmigration) involving images of death and rebirth" [1991:17]. Through these physical and psychic struggles and journeys order is created out of chaos.

Despite the distance between the North of England in the 1960s and the American South in the 1930s, there are continuities in Black experience, structured by racism and a common heritage. The experiences described by Black school pupils find an echo in Angelou's description of her graduation from school. The visiting white official

went on to praise us. He went on to say how he had bragged that "one of the best basketball players at Fisk sank his first ball right here at Lafayette County Training School".

The white kids were going to have a chance to become Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gaugins, and our boys (the girls weren't even in on it) would try to be Jesse Owens and Joe Louises.
[1984:174]

The life that Angelou subsequently manages to carve out for herself provides an inspiring catalogue of what it is possible for a Black woman to achieve. This, however, has had the unfortunate effect of lionising Angelou to the point where she is above criticism, either personally or in her writings:

what pisses me off is the fact that a lot of people reading her stuff will think, and do think, that you know, she's a really brilliant person and I don't

really like the way that Black people, Black women especially, are sort of put on pedestals... it's like you can't say or do anything wrong and you know, it just drives me mad cos... people've done it to me and it makes me feel like you can't function as a normal human being. [A4:157:12-20]

Marsha's major criticism of Angelou regards her attitude to lesbianism:

in some respects she's a very backward thinking person. Cos I think she's really homophobic for one thing" [A4:156:14-16]

I can't remember it specifically, to be able to tell you about it but it's... this scene where there's two lesbians in a bar or something like that and it's just the way the whole thing is depicted... [A4:157:1-7]

Angelou introduces the theme of lesbianism in her first autobiographical book, where she tells us that after reading The Well of Loneliness she becomes confused about her own sexual identity. It is her attempt to resolve this confusion that leaves her pregnant with her son, Guy. In her second book she has lost sympathy with lesbians, since "Their importance to me had diminished in direct relationship to my assurance that I was not [one]" [1985:43].

Nevertheless, while working as a barmaid Maya strikes up a conversation with two lesbian customers, who invite her

home for dinner. Despite her usually sympathetic portrayals of the characters she meets, Angelou describes Johnnie May and Beatrice as ugly, stupid and ultimately ridiculous. When Johnnie May gets her to dance with Beatrice, Maya becomes furious: "This was the ultimate insult. I would vent my spleen on those thick-headed lecherous old hags. They couldn't do me this way and get away with it." [1985a:56]

In Conversations With Maya Angelou the only interviewer who takes Angelou to task about this portrayal is the Scottish Black lesbian writer, Jackie Kay. In her defence, Angelou points out that she "wouldn't have been so mean, had I not sensed that they wanted to take advantage of me", and that "I had an aunt... who was a lesbian, and who I loved, and who helped me raise my son, Guy" [1989:200]. As Marsha says, however, "everybody can't be perfect" [A4:157:9].

Another book which made a great impact on Marsha was The Bell Jar:

I tend to judge, well judge isn't the right word, but I tend to sort of decide about a novel in terms of how much they actually move me, and I think the first one that really did that was The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath... I think I read that when I was about 14 or 15 and I just remember being, oh God I can't even describe the feeling, I was just really stunned I think by it. [A4:157:25-158:6]

The Bell Jar is an autobiographical novel based on Plath's experience of mental illness and recovery. Her protagonist, Esther Greenwood's, "interior monologue tells of her summer as a guest editor at Mademoiselle, her first serious romance and its breakup, her depression, her attempted suicide, and - most important to Sylvia - her recovery" [Wagner-Martin 1988:185].

In Sylvia Plath: A Biography, Linda Wagner-Martin places the novel in the context of 1950s American writing:

the book was written in the satirical voice of a Salinger or a Roth character, who uses a mixture of wry understatement and comic exaggeration. [1988: 185]

[it] spoke with the voice of an over-aged Smithie, reminiscent of the cynical Smith voice that coloured the campus newspaper and yearbook. It was a 1950s voice, a 1950s attitude... [1988:233]

Not only was the novel grounded in 50s writing, it was also expressive of the 50s experience of female college graduates: "'Greenwood' was her grandmother's maiden name, but it also had the connotation of growth and youth. As [Plath] reminded herself in her journal, the character of... Esther was to be symbolic: 'Make her a statement of the generation.'" [1988:143-144]. The conflicts women experienced at the time were symbolised in the image of the fig tree, from which Esther imagined herself unable to choose; the fruit meanwhile rotting. At the end of the

novel, however, Esther is reborn.

Elaine Showalter makes a different interpretation of The Bell Jar by reading it alongside other autobiographical novels by women which "place the blame for women's schizophrenic breakdowns on the limited and oppressive roles offered to women in modern society" [1987:213]. Showalter argues that it is the split between her femininity and her creativity that forces Sylvia into a schizophrenic position. She sees the novel as one of rebirth, but argues that Plath was reborn of man, via Electro Convulsive Therapy, thus resolving her contradiction. Wagner-Martin and Pat McPherson [1991], conversely, stress the importance of the other women in the book, even when they are rejected by Esther as possible role models. They argue that Esther is reborn of a woman, this time Doctor Nolan, her psychiatrist. The point at which healing and recovery begin to take place is when Esther realises and releases her feelings against her mother:

"I hate her," I said, and waited for the blow to fall.

But Doctor Nolan only smiled at me as if something had pleased her very, very much, and said, "I suppose you do." [Plath 1975:166]

Susan Bassnett argues that Sylvia Plath dealt with her relationship with her mother mainly within her prose writing, and that this "provides a central motif" for The Bell Jar [Bassnett 1987:79]. Thus we "can read The Bell

Jar as a mother-daughter conflict novel..." [Bassnett 1987:81]. McPherson further identifies the matrophobia in the novel, and Plath/Esther's failure to deal with this, in life and in art:

To find and hear the voice of the woman behind the mother is, I think, the daughter's crucial adolescent task. To know the woman before and beyond the mother enables the daughter to realize that self is not vapourized when Motherhood moves in and seems to Take Over in body-snatcher fashion. [1991:72]

It is during adolescence when many conflicts between mothers and daughters arise, as daughters attempt to assert their independence. There may be a certain satisfaction in vicariously experiencing the expression of such strong emotions against a mother figure who is simultaneously nurturing and supportive, and powerful and controlling.

There is also the sense of alienation permeating the book, expressed in the image of the bell jar itself. When her patron, Philomena Guinea, arranges for Esther to be taken from a public hospital to a comfortable private sanatorium, for example, she muses "I knew I should be grateful to Mrs. Guinea, only I couldn't feel a thing". It doesn't matter to her where she is sent, however perfect a place, since "I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air" [1975:152].

Also, in so far as Esther is clear about what she does not want, which is "to serve men in any way" [1975:62], she provides confirmation of the experience of young women who know that marriage is not for them:

And I knew that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showers on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service was ended was for her to flatten out underneath his feet like Mrs. Willards kitchen mat.

I began to think that maybe it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterwards you went about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state. [1975:69]

It is possible, therefore, despite the novel's stereotypical portrayal of Black people, and its ambivalent attitude to lesbianism, for a female reader critical of prevailing ideologies of femininity to identify with Esther's plight and to be moved by her story and encouraged by the message of hope at its conclusion.

At the time of the interview, Marsha was reading The Words To Say It:

the life story of... a white, upper-class woman who came also from a Catholic background and I think it's - it sort of starts when she's in a real state, you know mentally in a bad way, and it's really about the story of how she dealt with it... I'm

quite interested in mental illness [and] ... the actual issues that she's dealing with. [A4:162:4-14]

This autobiographical novel by Marie Cardinal is dedicated to her psychoanalyst, "the doctor who helped me be born", and opens with these words from Boileau's L'Art Poetique: "What one truly understands clearly articulates itself, and the words to say it come easily."

It tells of the author's seven years in analysis, during which time she emerges from the grip of a severe mental illness, which she characterises as the Thing. At the beginning of the book, she is suffering from extreme anxiety and near continuous menstrual bleeding: "fear had relegated me to the alienated of this world" [1983:17]. Her family, ashamed of her, have her incarcerated in her uncle's private hospital. Here, she feels that "the Thing had won. There was only it and me from now on. We were finally shut in alone" [1983:20].

Despite her illness, she manages, with the help of a friend, to escape and find herself a psychoanalyst. His disregard of her bleeding stops this psychosomatic symptom, and, free from medication, she begins her talk-cure: "perhaps it was my weapon against the Thing: that flood of words, that maelstrom, that mass of words, that hurricane!" [1983:53].

Helped by the doctor, she unpicks the layers of guilt and self-disgust, and discovers health, a renewed energy and

sexuality, her rebelliousness and capacity for violence, and the extent to which she has been constructed by her class, her religion, her gender:

Day after day since my birth, I had been made up: my gestures, my attitudes, my vocabulary. My needs were repressed, my desires, my impetus they had been damned up, painted over, disguised and imprisoned. After having removed my brain, having gutted my skull, they had stuffed it full of acceptable thoughts which suited me like an apron on a cow.
[1983:121]

While she was still a teenager, Marie's mother had told her that she had tried to abort her. This knowledge leaves Marie full of feelings of self-disgust. Only after her mother's death, when Marie has finally made a kind of peace by recognising the love she had for her mother, along with the hate, that she is able to terminate her analysis.

During this time she begins to write, filling notebooks which she hides under her mattress until one day she types it out and it becomes a novel. It then becomes her ambition to write a novel based on her experience of insanity, analysis and change:

To make them [people still trapped in their bourgeois "house of cards"] understand and to help those who lived in the hell where I also lived, I promised myself that I would some day write an

account of my analysis, and turn it into a novel in which I would tell of the healing of a woman as like me as if she were my own sister. I would begin with her birth, her slow re-entry into the world, the happy arrival into night and day, her "joie de vivre" and her wonder before the universe to which she belongs. [1983:180]

This ambition grew into the novel of which Bruno Bettelheim has written: "of all the accounts of psychoanalysis as experienced by the patient, none can compare with this novel, so superior is it in all respects" [1983:8].

For anyone with an interest in mental health, as Marsha has, this book is a fascinating document. It is also a devastating critique of bourgeois hypocrisy; a damning indictment of capitalist, patriarchal society. Despite this it retains an infectious enthusiasm for life. It contains an insightful account of the effects of the Roman Catholic church, which provides a means of identification for anyone who has rejected their own Catholicism. There are echoes of Marsha's own experience in the book:

I think having been brought up as a Catholic you, there are certain things that you just take for granted, and it's only when you sort of start mixing in the real world that you realise how sort of oppressed you've been and... how the negative aspects of religion have... had that negative influence on the way that you think, and the way that you feel, and just the way that you operate as

a human being. [A4:148:17-25]

Though radically different in their backgrounds, the writings of Angelou, Lorde, Plath and Cardinal share some common elements. Each tells of how a woman has survived despite oppressive circumstances. They share a sense of having triumphed over extreme adversity. Angelou, Plath and Cardinal all use the imagery of rebirth to describe this feeling; Angelou is constantly recreating herself in different places, under different names. All these writers share a sense of alienation from the dominant society, and a determination to change both it and themselves. Each emerges from trauma with a renewed vigor and enthusiasm for life.

In the works of Plath and Cardinal, the theme of failure and success is repeated. In the throes of their illnesses, both feel themselves to be total failures, unless they can prove to themselves and significant others that they are complete successes. Angelou is also prone to insecurity, and her phenomenal achievements may be seen as a way of dealing with this dilemma. As a single parent, she feels herself to be most vulnerable in her relationship with her son, and needs to believe that she is a "good" mother.

The theme of balancing the needs of the self with tending to the needs of others is also repeated throughout these works. Esther is driven mad by the pressure to be the perfect, ever-successful daughter. Marie Cardinal acts out

the "madness" of her mother. Angelou suffers a near breakdown at the thought that she might have damaged her son by placing her own needs first. Lorde is able to place her own needs for self-exploration and healing before those of the professionals who want her to wear a prosthesis. She is lucky to be surrounded by caring and supportive women friends.

The stories of Angelou, Plath and Cardinal can also be read as the stories of women becoming writers; they all find "the words to say it". Finding the right words is also important for Lorde, who uses them as weapons in her fight against cancer and those who cause it.

So far I have concentrated on Marsha's response to the content of what she has read; she also recalls responding to the language it is written in: "sometimes I read a book and think wow that's a brilliant phrase and go and write it down" [A4:161:20-22]. There is a connection here between the stories people have to tell and the language they find to express them: "I mean it's just interesting as well, looking at the different ways of life too, and what you can say with words" [A4:161:22-25]. There is evidence of the different ways in which readers may read texts, depending on what they are reading for. Reading has both affective and cognitive dimensions [Schweickart & Flynn 1986], although certain types of appreciation may involve both levels simultaneously. There is also a connection with an earlier way of becoming a writer; the

copying of passages of other writers' work was once thought to be the proper way to learn the craft of writing [Moss 1989].

III Writing and Black Identity

Before discussing Marsha's writing, it is necessary to situate it in terms of Black British writing generally, and secondly to make connections between this and lesbian writing. Though deceptively simple terms, neither of these categories is, upon closer examination, self-evident. As Suzanne Scafe points out, attempting to define Black literature is both difficult and politically charged. It is worth quoting her discussion at length:

"Black" literature is so defined because it is different from (white) literature. It is neither a description of form or of location, but is used cross-culturally and cross-nationally... The difference is one which is created and perpetuated by the selectivity of the literary establishment and its "tradition", and it is one which is exploited by Black writers themselves. The distinction is used by Black writers who use the term to describe their own work, to challenge that "tradition". It then becomes literature produced in opposition to an excluding and exclusive canon. In that sense it is polemical; created out of a supposed silence and the absence of a literary tradition and speaking of the struggle and conflict which form the context of production. It presents a challenge to critical methods which abstract meaning from the text, and to literary institutions which apply culturally selective criteria to define what is or isn't literature.

In an interview with Spare Rib magazine, the Black artist, Sonia Boyce states that "Black people come from so many different perspectives and places, and I am more interested in talking about what Black artists do, than what Black art is, because I think that you can write yourself into a corner" [1991:33]. In looking at Marsha's writing this is, in a sense what I am doing. I am using the term "Black literature", in this context, therefore, in an inclusive way, to mean any writing produced by a Black person, which they themselves define as Black writing.

The relationship between Black literature and the white canon and white literary theory is discussed by Henry Gates in Black Literature and Literary Theory. He argues that all Black literature is "two-toned" or "double-voiced", since it has its origins in both formal literature and Black vernacular. He also draws attention to the way in which it is precisely the "literariness" of the Black text which is ignored by critics:

Because of this curious valorization of the social and polemical functions of black literature, the structure of the black text has been repressed and treated as if it were transparent. The black literary work of art has stood at the centre of a triangle of relations (M. H. Abram's "universe", "artist" and "audience"), but as the very thing not to be explained, as if it were invisible, or

literal, or a one-dimensional document. [1984:5-6]

Gates concerns are shared in a British context by Suzanne Scafe:

To see Black literature as a rhetorical statement is to misunderstand completely the relationship between the writing and the circumstances of its production. Its political significance cannot be ignored, nor should it be used to deny the literary value of Black texts [1989:27-28].

This raises the issue of which, or whose, literary standards should be used to evaluate Black literature: "we have our own standards of excellence. I don't know whether they are the same as standards for other people's writings. Probably not, because a lot of people who are not Black don't know how to handle our stuff" [Prescod in Ngcobo 1988:110].

The way out of these dilemmas for Scafe lies in the way in which all literature is both approached critically and taught in schools: "an approach to literature which defines meaning as residing solely in the text excludes literature which is written, in part, as a conscious opposition to dominant literary modes. [...] Black literature signals its materiality more consciously" [1989:74]. In order for Black literature not to be constructed as wholly different in nature from (white) literature, it is necessary for all literature to be apprehended and taught in a contextualised manner. The

same point holds for language, too, in that Black Creole should not be isolated as "deviant" from the "norm" of standard English, but that the history and significance of all linguistic systems should be explored. (3)

Such an approach would also break down the false dichotomy between the "universal" and the culturally specific:

The terms "universality" and "human truths", standards by which texts are judged, prove irrelevant when used in relation to non-white texts. They can be applied to white, male, middle-class experience, but by implicit definition they exclude most other experiences. [Scafe 1989:98]

If white, male, middle-class experience and its expression were both problematised and contextualised, it would no longer be possible to draw this distinction.

Much of the available critical and theoretical material on Black literature is written from an African-American perspective, treating African-American experience and authors. With a few notable exceptions, much of the critical work on Black British writers is contained in introductions to anthologies. In her introduction to Lemn Sissay's Tender Fingers in a Clenched Fist, Valerie Bloom notes that

The last decade has seen exceptional literary activity among Black British writers... Encouraged by the success of Grace Nichols, John Agard, James Berry, Merle Collins, Benjamin Zephaniah and Linton

Kwesi Johnson, to name a few, we have been documenting our experiences, with the result that there is now an abundance of material on issues such as racism, other forms of oppression and the experience of being black in Britain. [in Sissay 1988:ix]

What Bloom is referring to here is published or performed writing, that which has found a public. Marsha Prescod adds an important qualification to the idea of a recent "explosion" of Black writing:

If I can bump into a Black woman writing poetry at seventy-six years of age, and if I can read in some of the more progressive history books that we've been in Britain on and off for centuries, then it's quite likely that Black people in Britain have been writing for as long as we've been here. Whether the writing has been published, of course, is another matter. [in Ngcobo 1988:110]

Getting published is still difficult for Black writers, particularly in times of recession when publishing houses prefer to import market-proven American bestsellers, rather than take a chance with new British authors. A number of independent Black presses, such as Bogle L'Ouverture and Black Woman Talk, have been established to get the work of Black writers to the public, but their output is necessarily small. Despite these problems, however, an identifiable Black British culture is being formed.

Within the orbit of Black writing, it is necessary to particularise the work of Black women. Lauretta Ngcobo links Black women's writing to their social position:

In the mainstream of life in Britain today, Black-women are caught between white prejudice, class prejudice, male power and the burden of history. Being at the centre of Black life, we are in daily confrontation with various situations and we respond in our writings to our experiences - social, political and economic. [1988:1]

This structural position leads to the adoption of a particular form of writing: "many Black women writers prefer to communicate through poetry, a medium of expression which effectively enables them to deal immediately with the subjects that engage Black society, and to address our audiences in languages they understand and appreciate" [1988:2].

When I asked Marsha about how she decided what was going to become a poem, and what a short story, she answered along similar lines:

with stories it tends to be an idea... I think about something and I think, yeah, that could be a little story or a little piece of prose or something. But I mean where poems are concerned, it tends to be things that have happened you know, real life, and therefore... more interesting and more hard hitting.

[A4:171:18-24]

To return to the point Ngcobo raises about addressing an audience, we can include here the dilemma that she acknowledges this raises:

Writing under such cultural domination, the Black-woman is pressured by three conflicting motives: the instinct to write for its own sake, the artist for herself; the demand to keep faith with our own society; and the need to defend our culture against further erosion. [1988:17]

Marsha finds that she addresses this question, not at the moment of writing, but when deciding how to present her work. Initially she writes

for me first, right, certainly where poetry is concerned... although if I'm doing a reading I will kind of tailor the poems that I choose, depending on you know, who's out there. Cos it's... a bit of a waste of time if you feel like you're sort of banging your head against a wall [L] all night, you know people just aren't hearing what it is that you're saying. [A4:174:3-10]

For Marsha, as well as for many other Black writers, published or otherwise, writing is particularly about creating a sense of a Black identity, both personally and for the Black community. Marsha is aware that this is something she has had to find for herself. This is the result of

the fact that I was living in an all-white environment, but also because of the experience and just

the life that my Mum and Dad have had... the idea of identifying strongly as a Black person just doesn't seem to be within their realm of experience. Therefore I think... actually coming to identify yourself as [Black], for me... is... something which I've had to find for myself and like just go through myself and not have any support or anything like that.

[A4:152:1-11]

This experience of creating an identity is both individual and collective. It would not have been possible, in the same way, a generation earlier. In their introduction to Charting the Journey, the editors explain that their book is about an "idea of 'Blackness' in contemporary Britain. An idea as yet unmatured and inadequately defined, but proceeding along its path in both 'real' social life and in the collective awareness of its subjects" [Grewal et al. 1988:1].

These authors admit the difficulty of the task with which Black people are faced in creating a collective identity, partly because of artificially, colonially created division within the community itself, and partly because of the contradictions inherent in claiming a Black identity while simultaneously working to end a society based on "racial" divisions. Despite these problems, however, the process is a liberating one: "to claim an identity as a Black woman has been a necessary historical process, often very invigorating and giving a sense of

belonging, a sense of having arrived" [1988:257]. Thus, on a personal level, it counters the sense of "unbelonging" poignantly described by Joan Riley in her novel of the same name.

The processes of reading and writing are often central to this undertaking. Marsha described her deliberate purchase of books by Black authors. Suzanne Scafe records the idea of Black school pupils:

Kehinde explains that she wants to study Black literature because it is an important part of her discovery of herself, which needs to be developed, explored and used to counter the dominance of cultural forms and practices from which she feels alienated. [1989:12]

Paul McGilchrist edited an anthology of winning entries from the Afro-Caribbean Education Resource Centre's annual young writers competition. In his introduction he acknowledges the importance of the pieces collected:

In the first part of the collection *A Face and A Soul* in turn look at the importance of identity for young Black people growing up in a white society, and at the ways in which a positive self-perception, both physically and spiritually are a liberating and unifying force for all Black peoples. [1987:xi-xii]

In her short autobiography for the anthology Talkers Through Dream Doors, Sua Huab explains:

I was born in Wigan in 1969 of Somali/English

parentage and lived there until I was eighteen. Living in an almost completely white area for this number of years made the creation of any kind of Black identity virtually impossible; and this is one of the many reasons I value writing so highly.

[Commonword 1989:93]

Along with reading and writing, music also ranks of high importance: "for writers who have grown up in Britain, Black music has been one of the most important sources of technical and rhythmic innovation" [Cobham & Collins 1987:9]. Again this is something that Marsha has had to discover for herself:

I wasn't brought up with any Black music at all except, yeah, The Jackson Five and that I do remember [A4:176:9-11]

most of the stuff that I've been exposed to has been... European type music and sounds. So you know I think that's why it is that I go for that sort of stuff mainly, and it's really only in recent years that I've been more exposed to Black music. [A4:176:15-19]

Marsha's work also has a particular local context. Manchester has for several years had a thriving community writing scene, based around the Commonword project and its publishing spin-off, Crocus Books. Black writers have a distinct voice within this structure through Cultureword: "Cultureword through Commonword aims to promote, encourage

and support Black writers towards print and then expand into other areas such as performance and any other innovative ways of expanding the creativity of the writer" [Commonword 1988:xiii].

The poet Lemn Sissay became the first Afro-Caribbean/Asian development worker for Cultureword, and organised its poetry and prose competitions, of which Marsha was a prize-winner in 1986. It is through this that her untitled poem appears in the Black and Priceless anthology. Sissay also co-edits the Identity magazine in which she has had several pieces published. Marsha has also performed her poetry at venues in the Manchester area.

The performance aspect is integral to Marsha's poetry. Lauretta Ngcobo outlines the significance of this style of poetry:

This outspoken poetry stirs a sense of pride and a spirit of resilience as it probes political questions and engages in self-investigation. It is dramatic. It forces people to listen, young and old. Performed at various gatherings, at political rallies, in churches and in entertainment halls, it captures audiences who would never buy a poetry book or go to a library. It helps them laugh at their own pain and to pick up new courage to face their arduous lives. [1988:3]

Later in the same book, Valerie Bloom delineates other

properties of the performance poem:

The common factor in all my poems is that they are written for performance rather than simply to be read on the page. This means that I have had to sacrifice some literary techniques to give the poems an immediacy which is easy to assimilate. It also means that only fifty per cent of the poems are actually on the page, the other fifty per cent being in the performance. [in Ngcobo 1988:86]

Talking of her own poetry, Marsha expresses a similar feeling:

sometimes I'm aware that it might not be particularly well written or you know, some of the words... may seem a bit awkward or not quite right but if I might feel that that is how I want it to stay, so that I don't lose the actual feeling that I'm trying to portray [I leave it]... I don't want to sort of get into making the work too tailored and you know like too professional if you like. I just want it to be as it is, as much as possible. [A4:181:7-15]

The poets who have most impressed Marsha both fit into the category of performance poetry. The Manchester born Lemn Sissay fits most easily into this mould, but while Patti Smith is usually thought of as a rock singer and lyricist, she originally conceived of her work as poetry, and performed it on the New York circuit.

Of Lemn Sissay, Marsha says:

reading his poetry, right, or listening to it or seeing him perform, it's just a really interesting experience because I know that he has had an experience of life which is very much like my own and it's, in some ways it's like he's inside my head, you see, he's just saying the same things I would say if I could say them that way. [A4:159:24-160:2]

Not only is Sissay's experience similar to Marsha's, he also deals with it in a way which coincides with Marsha's views on the purpose of poetry:

it's no good if someone is... going on about unrequited love and all this business because I mean it [L] it's OK if... you've got the privilege to just sort of think and exist on that level but... I haven't... I prefer something which can speak more directly to me. [A4:160:3-9]

Lemn Sissay's first collection of poetry, Perceptions of the Pen, was published in 1985 and is now out of print. His second book, Tender Fingers in a Clenched Fist, was published in 1988. The contrast encapsulated in the title between the delicacy of the human hand and the defiance of the gesture is repeated throughout the collection, in references to the weak, tender and soft, and the hard, strong and forceful. Other contrasts, such as those between black and white (as colours and as peoples) and screaming/crying and laughing/smiling are also employed.

In "Tense, Tattered, Tortured, Tried, Tested And Torn", for example, he writes, "I am a scream/ I cry but then I laugh and slowly smile". He uses metaphors of monstrosity, common among Black writers, to describe the racism of white society:

Like being sliced up in a whirlpool of sharp edged glass
Engulfed in the snapping teeth of the white working class
Whose deformed shape and deranged identity
Carelessly recklessly blows it's blame upon me
["Getting Under My Skin Is Not Getting In"]

Sissay explores a variety of situations, across continents and across history, but his uniting theme is Black experience. Some poems are written directly as challenges to white people, such as the patronising liberal in "Trendy Places Liberal Clones":

I know it's hip to hide your ego trip
But you're not doing such a good job of it
Because for the past ten minutes you've been giving shit
Giving me the well trodden over written prelude
Of you and your anti-racist attitude

The collection bears all the hallmarks of contemporary Black performance poetry; rhythm, intensity, directness, a combination of humour, anger and the expression of pain.

Marsha also admires the poetic lyrics of Patti Smith's songs:

I find that a lot of singers produce really brilliant lyrics, which I regard as poetry really,

because if you just sit and listen to it, it is an amazing experience... and I just remember thinking you know, if I could write like anybody I'd write words like her songs because they're just absolutely amazing. [A4:175:9-18]

Smith began in 1971 to read her poetry to a guitar backing, and in 1973 met the publicist, Jane Freidman, who became her manager and persuaded her to sing [Hopkin 1982]. In contrast to Sissay, Smith produces dense, sometimes obscure and deeply symbolic lyrics. Much of her imagery, especially since her fall from a stage and near-miraculous recovery, is religious, though in a highly idiosyncratic interpretation, blending Christianity with Native American cosmology. She frequently uses the image of the Tower of Babel and the metaphor of a common language to express the possibilities for peace and real communication:

What I'm interested in is pre-Tower of Babel time... It's like the Tower of Babel when they split all our tongues. Everyone talked the same language, everyone had the same rhythm, everyone could communicate telepathically. I'm lookin' to rock and roll to be the new tongues extending. [quoted in Goldsmith 1980:189]

What Smith shares with Sissay is a sense of alienation from the society she lives in, and an anger towards it. She uses the "macho" rhythm of rock music to express

female anger and attempts to unite all "outsiders" with her concept of the "Rock and Roll Nigger": "through her alternative interpretation of rock music she addresses her own marginality and that of other oppressed people" [Goldsmith 1980:189].

If it is difficult to define "Black literature", it is equally difficult to define "lesbian literature", since neither of these terms has stability. These difficulties are most apparent in the attempt to construct a lesbian tradition. As writers such as Lillian Faderman [1980] have pointed out, the attempt to read back through the past and decide who was and who wasn't a lesbian is problematic, since both the meaning of the word, relationships between women and constructions of sexuality have changed over time. Bonnie Zimmerman [1986] points out that it then becomes particularly difficult to isolate lesbian writers and lesbian texts.

Feminist scholarship has not always facilitated lesbian criticism. Those texts which have now formed a "canon" of feminist criticism, Showalter's A Literature of Their Own, Ellen Moers' Literary Women, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic, have been at best ambivalent towards lesbian writers or thematics, at worst openly homophobic. For Black and working-class women, there are further problems of visibility. Those women who can be most easily claimed for a lesbian tradition, such as Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein and H. D., have usually

been middle or upper-class, white women. Uncovering a poetic tradition representative of lesbians of color and poor and working-class lesbians of all races involves, as Barbara Noda has written, reexamining "the words 'lesbian', 'historical', and even 'poetic'". [quoted in Bulkin 1982:38]

The problem of identifying a lesbian tradition, against which to place contemporary lesbian texts has been compounded by the self-censorship of lesbian writers in the past, or their "protection" by those close to them, who destroyed what they believed to be "incriminating" material. As Bonnie Zimmerman notes:

One of the most pervasive themes in lesbian criticism is that woman-identified writers, silenced by a homophobic and misogynist society, have been forced to adopt coded and obscure language and internal censorship. Emily Dickinson counseled us to "tell all the truth/ but tell it slant", and critics are now calculating what price we have paid for slanted truth. [1986:207]

The 1960s and 70s, however, saw a move away from "slanted" writing to a more open approach. In her essay on lesbian poetry in the Lesbian Studies collection, Elly Bulkin traces the origins of this change:

The flowering of lesbian poetry that began slowly in the late sixties and had reached full bloom by the mid-seventies was rooted in the civil

rights and antiwar movements, which supported challenging the various racist, imperialistic values of contemporary American society. [1982:36]

She also makes connections between lesbian writing and other radical poetries of the same era:

Grahn's direct, everyday language with a rhetorical drive draws on oral traditions of poetry - biblical, Black, beat, protesting - and seems to be meant to be read aloud at women's meetings. [1982:37]

The focus in [Grahn's] and other poems is on the poem as bridge, not as obstacle. The work of these early lesbian writers seems deliberately, perhaps even defiantly "antipoetic". [1982:37]

This link between Black and lesbian poetry is important when discussing the tradition out of which a Black lesbian may write. In her essay "No More Buried Lives", Barbara Christian poses what she believes to be the central question concerning Black lesbian writing: "how does being black and being lesbian, in a society that restricts women, condemns homosexuality, and punishes non-whites, contribute to a writer's understanding of self and community?" [1984:188-189]. Writing is characterised implicitly here as a way of expressing this self/community understanding. Lesbian theory and literary criticism also had to reconstruct itself in the face of challenges from women who asserted the importance of differences between lesbians [Moraga 1983; Zimmerman 1992].

For Carmen, Gail, Shaila and Pratibha, who took part in the "Becoming Visible" discussion in Feminist Review, an important issue is visibility: "as Black lesbians in Britain we are growing in numbers and strength... it is only when we begin to make ourselves visible that we can break the silence about our lives" [1984:53]. Writing is an integral part of this process. Marsha's untitled poem deals with this issue; her visibility to herself and others as Black and as lesbian, and the consequences these visibilities have for her. In the Black lesbian discussion, Pratibha also makes the point that "while my sexuality is part of me, it's not the only thing. My race and class are equally important" [1984:59]. That this is also true for Marsha comes out strongly in her poetry.

Marsha's writing fits into the category of Black performance poetry both in its structure and in its thematics. Rhythm and rhyme are most marked in the Untitled piece in Black and Priceless. This poem consists of two stanzas of three rhyming couplets each. It deals with her experience of living in a mainly white community, albeit an "alternative" one. The "I" of the poem attempts to "adapt", to fit in with this society until a racist attack ends her "Utopian" illusion of a society of "peers" in which skin colour does not matter.

In the other poems, the rhythm is less obvious, and a strict rhyming scheme abandoned in favour of half-rhymes, assonance and alliteration. These are combined with the

use of repetition for a forceful effect:

The face is happy

The happy mask covers a face

Crying out of pain and shame, desparation, blame.

[Mask Out]

Be stripped of all garments, your dignity, respect.

Be prostituted and killed.

[Life On The Other Side]

I will not forgive, I will not forget

[Poem For George]

Tell me of your lies of past lives

Old tales of historical "successes"

Take your copious notes and

Dispose of them as you wish

[A Painting]

With Sissay and the other poets in the Commonword/Culture-word Black and Priceless and Talkers through Dream Doors collections, and in other anthologies of Black women's writing, such as Black Women Talk Poetry [Black Womantalk 1987] and Watchers and Seekers [Cobham & Collins 1987] Marsha shares a common set of themes and images, developed out of the experience of Black people in a racist society. The use of contrasts and oppositions is marked, particularly that of black and white. The division which is

imposed on Black people is appropriated and used in
visually powerful imagery:

... a white-washed, black-oppressed world

[Life On The Other Side]

Show me the whiteness, this innocence
and dare me to smash your
pitiful illusions

[A Painting]

Colour imagery is particularly important in this poem,
which adds the use of red to denote anger. The Black
person is the canvas upon which the white artist/racist
tries to paint the illusion of his/her world-view:

For when I see my million
Black faces
Shattering to deep cold black

See the redness in my eyes
Glow eternal
And spit fire

Other important contrasts in the poetry include the
dynamic of power versus powerlessness and the emotional
contrast between happiness (smiling, laughter) and pain
(crying, screaming). The first of these appears most
forcefully in "Life On The Other Side" and the second in
"Mask Out".

The themes of anger and rage are repeated in all the poems. In the Untitled piece it is implicit in the cynicism and irony of the last two lines:

But they don't care, they doing you a favour
Getting rid of blacks is tough unpaid labour.

In the other poems "I" is more explicit:

Know my fury

Away from your gloom of power

[A Painting]

My rage is real, not imagined.

And will kill you with one blow.

[Life On The Other Side]

The "I" of the poems accepts that violence will be necessary to free Black people from racism, and that anger will be its fuel. The racist is directly addressed as "you":

I will avenge my people and myself

[Poem for George]

And express no surprise

When I coolly and calmly

Mash up your face

Break your neck,

And shoot you dead.

[Life On The Other Side]

Images of monstrosity are employed to depict racist society:

Their system, this monster, it's cultivated inside me.

Their monster will return to its roots, the profoundest pit.

[Poem For George]

Heart pummelled by the butchers hands

[Mask Out]

The poems acknowledge that the monster is not only an external threat; it also attempts to colonise the minds of Black people:

Colour me white, then show me a mirror

Tell me I need help, and give me your medicine man.

[A Painting]

As with other Black writers, words are seen as weapons in the fight against the monster.

Marsha's interest in mental health is inscribed in some of these poems. In "A Painting", the "medicine man" attempts to warp the perceptions of the Black "I". In "Life On The Other Side", the labels which are used against Black people are turned around:

Be told of your "disposition" for being "temperamental",

Your inability to concentrate,

"A distinct lack of interest",

This poem links mental and physical abuse and delineates the pain and anger that they cause.

The language of the poems is generally straightforward, everyday language. In "Life On The Other Side" the jargon used to oppress Black people is integrated. The exception to this, however, is the "Poem For George" which uses biblical language and associations:

Hell's heat can't still my soul.

I will avenge my people and myself.

my roots are a righteous and a just people,

Slow to anger, with devastating rage.

George Jackson was a member of the Black Panthers, who was killed by a prison guard in St. Quentin in 1971. The notion of being slow to anger, but dispensing a just revenge reflects the Panther's choice of name. Huey P. Newton chose the emblem of the Panther not simply for its colour but because the "nature of a panther is that he never attacks. But if anyone attacks him or backs him into a corner, the panther comes up to wipe that aggressor or that attacker out, absolutely, resolutely, wholly, thoroughly and completely" [Seale 1970:65].

Marsha also has ideas on what she would like to write in the future, which fall into two categories, writing for children and writing biographies. In the former case she intends to write poetry, using her experience of caring for a young girl to gain insight into what makes children "respond" [A4:182:7] in various ways. In the latter, her priority is to write the story of her mother's life. Her mother's reaction to this was one of surprise:

I think she was on the one hand a bit put out that any one would want to write about her life, you know like, "God, I've had such a boring life", or you know run of the mill activities, and on the other hand I think you know she was kind of milling over in her mind what it would be like for people to read about what I've done in my life, you know who would sort of want to read it. [A4:170:9-16]

To Marsha, however, it is important that these "ordinary" and extraordinary experiences are collected. She challenges the categories of those who are considered to be worth writing about, recognising their political construction, and see her work as part of a wider project of working-class biography:

I just think it's a great shame that people like that, who I call great people, can live and die and then you know, and that's the end of it... But I mean I think that's happened, and still does happen, a lot as far as working-class people are concerned and you know, it can't go on. [A4:170:22-28]

Biographical and autobiographical writing is important to Marsha in different ways. The first book she found with Black characters in it was a biography of St. Martin. From being a child she has intermittently kept a diary, and she describes herself as a "writing sort of person" [A4:165 25-26]. Occasionally poems fulfill that function:

I mean it is a useful exercise even just to write

poetry and not to perform it or you know, never ever to let anyone else read it because I think it tells me a lot about myself and I can look back at stuff that I've written years ago and I think yeah, yeah I can see how I've sort of moved on from there, and I can sort of just remember about how I actually felt at that time. [A4:168:1-8]

This quest for self-understanding could also be characterised as autobiographical. Marsha's poems are also autobiographical in that she takes life experiences, particularly experiences of racism and transforms them into forms of understanding, artistic products and the means of fighting back against the "white monster"; poetry being the most personally immediate and the most "hard hitting" way of doing this.

Black autobiography has specific roots in the use of slave narratives as vehicles of protest [McPherson 1991]. The autobiographical self is not the result of a natural flowering, but "develops in opposition to, rather than as an articulation of, the condition. Yet the condition remains as that against which the self is forged" [Fox-Genovese 1988:64]. Black women are also less likely to use the confessional mode adopted by some white women [Fox-Genovese 1988].

Reading and hearing the stories of others like oneself is an affirming experience. As Carolyn Heilbrun [1989]

argues, it is not lives which becomes models, but the stories that are told of them. Life stories have played an important part in the development of Black Studies, since much Black history and literature is inscribed in this way [Olney 1980]. Stories can be used, therefore, to re-vision the past and to en-vision a future. It is partly this link between biography and the search for meaning which has accounted for its popularity:

the confirmation it offers that life stories can be told, that the inchoate experience of living and feeling can be marshalled into a chronology, that central and unified subjects reach the conclusion of a life, and come into possession of their own story.
[Steedman 1990:247]

Notes

1) This experience is also discussed in Osler [1989] and Dodgson [1984].

2) The saint to which Marsha is referring is St Martin of Peru (1579-1639). The illegitimate son of a Spanish knight and a Black freed-woman, at 12 Martin was apprenticed to a barber-surgeon and at 15 he joined the order of St Dominic. He was admitted to the Rosary convent of the Friars Preachers at Lima where he established an orphanage and other charitable institutions, distributed alms, and cared for the sick and the slaves who were brought from Africa. He became famous for his penances and for his supernatural powers. He was canonised in 1962 and is the patron saint of social justice.

3) The question of Black English language is as much if not more politically charged as that of Black literature. Frequently dismissed as non-standard, implicitly sub-standard, it is used to explain the underachievement of Black children in British schools. The work of authors such as Suzanne Scafe [1989] and David Sutcliffe [1982 & 1986] does much to counter the myths and reclaim the history, politics and linguistic richness of Creole and Black English. Since Marsha neither writes nor discusses authors who write in Creole, I have not included a detailed discussion of it in this chapter.

UNTITLED

I thought I could be one of the crowd
I learnt for a while to be coarse and loud
Emulating those I considered my peers
The weirdos, the dope heads, the dykes and the queers.
But even then I lived in a Utopian world
Because in first and in last I was just a Black girl.

I tried to change, to adapt in some way
It almost worked I felt, until one day
A racist came up to me and smashed me in the head
And left me on the street, I might have been dead
But they don't care, they doing you a favour
Getting rid of blacks is tough unpaid labour.

LIFE ON THE OTHER SIDE

Be stripped of all garments, your dignity, respect.
Be prostituted and killed.
Have your body violated,
Battered and bruised,
And know that what I feel
Is not anger,
But rage.
Know what pain is:
Being called
Blackie, sambo, black bastard, nigger,
And realise your children
Will suffer the same abuse.
Be powerless to fight back.
Be threatened with the law,
Which will kill you no matter what,
And know that what I feel
Is not anger
But rage.
Be told of your "disposition" for being "temperamental",
Your inability to concentrate,
"A distinct lack of interest",
And an incessant hostility
In a white-washed, black-oppressed world,
And know that
My rage is real, not imagined.
And will kill you with one blow.
Dare to stand before me,
And tell me that
I am o-ver-sen-si-tive,
Have a
Chip on my shoulder
Cannot mix well with others.
And express no surprise
When I coolly and calmly
Mash up your face
Break your neck,
And shoot you dead.

MASK OUT

The face is happy
The happy mask covers a face
Crying out of pain and shame, desperation, blame.
Heart pummelled with the butcher's hands
And life slips off the edge of the world.

The face is happy
Covered by a convenient smile
Which laughs and cries
And yet can feel nothing
Of every moment's screaming pain
Made lame by a motionless face

Disgrace fuelled by others' rampant fears
And tears of joy as the boulder
Blows another away
Beyond the banks of the bended knee

As the question resounds
Where will you be
And where is the mask now
That your scarred face
Reflects the indentations
Of a much-worn mask

The flash casts back
The sounds of smiles
Deters us in our glorious hideaway
Peels off the mask
We see your face
And take aim to blink it away

A PAINTING

Colour me white, then show me a mirror
Tell me I need help, and give me your medicine man
To open my eyes, give them a reddish glow

Tell me of your lies of past lives
Old tales of historical "successes"
Once I've seen the mirror
My eyes cannot move
Their fixed stare
Becomes a glare

Show me the whiteness, this innocence
and dare me to smash your
pitiful illusions

Take your copious notes and
Dispose of them as you wish

For when I see my million
Black faces
Shattering to deep cold black

See the redness in my eyes
Glow eternal
And spit fire, burning down
Your coward's back
Along your seated complacency

Know my fury
Away from your gloom of power
And see me
Walk away
Unhurt, untouched.

POEM FOR GEORGE (JACKSON - SOLEDAD BROTHER)

Their system, this monster, it's cultivated inside me.
Their monster will return to its roots, the profoundest pit.
Catapult me into my next life,
Hell's heat can't still my soul.
I will avenge my people and myself.
My roots are a righteous and a just people,
Slow to anger, with devastating rage.
Undam that rage, and know the destruction and pain my people
have felt for four centuries;
Four hundred years, and when we gather at monster's door,
Our numbers will be so great that the pounding of our feet
will create thunder in the sky and in the earth.
Our revenge will be years of blood.
We will attack as a wounded elephant charges.
I will stampede upon monster's chest, with a spear in my eyes
to pierce his vicious heart.
This nigger is seriously dissatisfied.
I will not forgive, I will not forget.
If I am not to be charged with guilt,
I am guilty of not despising the monster enough.
Prepare for massacre without negotiation.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In the preface to this thesis I used the personal as a way of introducing some of its concerns and directions. I did this because I wanted to establish links between my experience, that is my story, and the tale I was about to tell of the stories I gathered from my interviewees. I also began in that manner because those were the issues I was interested in when I read other accounts of the research process. I want now to return to the personal, and use the sense in which the writing of the thesis has been another story, to examine some of the most important theoretical, methodological and epistemological issues to have emerged from it.

The interview was the moment at which my story intersected with the stories of my interviewees. From then on, what you have read is my story of their stories. Standpoint epistemology is particularly useful for this thesis, in that it conceptualises the idea of a story being told from one viewpoint. The particular academic standpoint I have chosen is one of the ways in which this is my story of the women's stories.

Standpoint epistemology also acknowledges the importance of creating knowledge from the point of view of women while allowing that this category is a construct, and that differences between women are also important. Categories such as "women" have a use in that they allow generalisa-

tions to take place, without which social analysis would be impossible. They also have a political use in allowing people to group together to fight various oppressions.

Standpoint theory has itself developed during the time of writing this thesis. The original slippage between the terms "women" and "feminist" has been challenged, and both categories acknowledged as multiple as opposed to unitary. It has become necessary to specify the precise standpoint from which knowledge is being generated, rather than assume that it is shared by other women. There is also a congruence between the ideas of standpoint epistemology and reader-response criticism, since each is concerned with the creation of knowledge from a particular viewpoint or reading position.

The thesis itself also has a developmental story. The ideas that were finally written up were very different from my research proposal. Originally I had wanted to do an action research project, but was unable to obtain funding to run the kind of small local women writers workshop that I had in mind. I had also planned a much larger survey of working-class women's writing, but after my first interview realised how much data could be generated from each one. The case study on Kate as presented above, for example, is a radically cut version of the first draft. Considering the interviews as they happened also shifted the nature of the questions I was interested in, as did the reading, of both literature and

theory, that each one generated. Considering the similarities and differences between the case studies led me to an interest in the links between personal and social identities.

The movement of the thesis over time was paradoxically towards the individual and the general simultaneously. As I searched for an adequate means to study working-class women's writing I realised that what was satisfactory for the study of one group's writing should also be so for the study of any writing. To do other than this would be to join with those who consign working-class women's writing to the category of non-literature. So while my study took me to the heart of the work of individual writers it also developed into much broader theoretical terms, and into an interest in the potential of reader-response criticism to address the issues I was concerned with.

The finished thesis may itself be seen as a story, shaped by the conventions of a particular genre. A chronological account of the research process would look very different, with case study, theory and methodology interwoven rather than parcelled off into discrete units. The order of the chapters also implies a sequence of thinking, giving primacy to methodology and theory, whereas the reality was very different with issues pertaining to these areas thrown into relief as the work progressed. The narrative promotes the idea that the work was a kind of unfolding of an original idea into a larger piece. It covers up the

halts, the detours and the dead ends. There is no sense of conflict or confusion. This increases its readability, but is guilty of distorting the nature of academic work.

The interview with Kate, for example, illustrates how some events are edited out of the final account. I had gone along to meet her expecting a fairly straightforward account of a working-class childhood. In the workshop session I had attended I had heard her story up to the point at which she reaches Salford. Her disclosure of abuse was a shock to me and opened up the question of the ethics of making a thesis out of the pain of others. This question also applies, though in less dramatic form, to each of the other case studies.

It took some time for me to resolve this issue, but I eventually decided that Kate had told me what she wanted to tell; that the interview had been for her another avenue for making the story public; that she had contributed to setting the agenda. Her willing and deliberate disclosure during an interview, the purpose of which she was already aware, amounted to consent to my use of her story, and that this principle also held for the other interviews.

Each interview gave me a series of starting points, a set of clues to follow up. The case studies unfolded as a series of detective stories for me, as I tracked down ideas and made connections. The ways in which I did this

however, and the kind of evidence I looked for, were confined by my own interests and preoccupations, and by my politics. On occasion these views would significantly conflict with those of my interviewees. Kate's religious perspective, for example, is very different from my own views and I had to search for a way of incorporating it in my story of her story without portraying her as the victim of an ideology.

The concept of cognitive authority is important here, since it provides a way of acknowledging the power dynamics in the research situation. Within the parameters of PhD research, work has to be individual and original. This conflicts with more collaborative feminist models of the research process. I have become the "expert" on these women's lives, or at least on their manner of telling them.

For me this raised the question of the right of the researcher to speak for the subjects of her research. This question was made most obvious to me in the process of developing a case study on a Black woman's writing. It was Marsha who made the right to read what was written about her a condition of granting the interview. I believe that by making my standpoint clear I am acknowledging that while speaking about my subjects, I am only speaking for myself.

In practical terms I tried to share my ideas with the

women I spoke to, but met with a range of responses. Doreen, for example, did not want to read what I'd written, seeming to feel that her writing was in some way being judged by an expert. In academic terms this cannot be resolved within the boundaries of a thesis, but still needs to be raised as an issue. Recognising the ways in which this is my story is a way of saying that I am not speaking for the women and neither are they speaking for themselves, but that their stories are mediated by mine.

The case-studies have indicated the usefulness of an approach based in a reader-response criticism which takes account of actual situated readers. The choice of case studies as a means of considering and presenting the data generated from the interviews allowed me a large degree of flexibility in developing the thesis, as its directions could be dictated by the issues that the women felt to be important, as well as by my own concerns and interpretations. It made it possible for me to use narrative to convey my findings. Finally it allowed me both to concentrate on certain individuals while developing more general theoretical concerns about the interconnections between personal and social identities and the means people have available to express their sense of them.

This approach allows for a detailed analysis of the uses made of reading in the construction both of pieces of writing and of a sense of self. The notion of identity as a construct is becoming recognised as an important move

beyond the feminism/post-modernism impasse. Studies of the ways in which people do construct identities have a useful role to play in developing these theoretical concerns.

Studies of what actual readers think about and do with their reading materials can be used to test the propositions of reader-response theory. Concepts such as the "resisting reader" [Fetterly 1978] and the "dual hermeneutic" [Schweickart 1986] can be judged against people's reports of their own reading. The comprehensive feminist work on the romance genre provides an example of what reader-response criticism can achieve when fully developed, and combined with other approaches.

Each woman was using her writing for a particular purpose. Marsha describes herself as a "writing sort of person" [A4:165:25-26] and uses her writing to create a positive identity as a Black person in a racist society. Marilyn uses her writing and her attendance at a writers' group to create a new life for herself after experiencing a breakdown. Kate says, "Only now, since I'm writing my life story am I finding out why I am as I am" [A1:12:10-11]. And later, "This is me, this is what I'm writing. Because that's the core of writing I think, this is me, be it man or woman, listen to me, I've got something to say" [A1:32:24-26]. Doreen believes that writing is "a way of being human" [A3:138:2-3] and "a way of bringing out what's going on inside your own heart so to speak, and you can get control of the thing better, and understand it better"

[A3:120:26-28]. As she sees it "we're telling each other stories all the time" [A3:140:25-26].

It is, nevertheless, inappropriate to draw sweeping conclusions on the nature of "working-class women's writing" from a study such as this, particularly since I have argued the case for attention to be paid to the context in which the writing is produced. The author's membership of a writers' group has played some part in the production of each of the pieces of writing discussed above. There are, however, several commonalities which emerge from the interviews and from the women's writing.

Working-class women have historically been excluded from literature and literary life, both as writers and as heroines of texts. In discussing the case of a Victorian murderess whose act of despair both made a story of and brought an end to her life, Marion Glastonbury argues that "Seen and not heard, their exertions supply writers and artists with a source of symbolism, sensuality and satire. On the rare occasions they speak for themselves, they do so under special pressure; in this case, under duress" [1979:127].

This is the continuing burden under which contemporary working-class women writers struggle. Considering the case of script writing on television, the editors of The Common Thread point out that it "is rare that working-class women have significant storylines developed around them.

Instead, they occupy the sidelines or back-of-stage, as waitresses, servants, relatively passive roles, there to service the leading players or provide comic relief" [Burnett et al. 1989:3].

None of these women grew up thinking of themselves as future "Writers", although both Doreen and Marsha enjoyed writing as children. None of them received much encouragement to write either in school or out. As adults, however, the encouragement of others, particularly other women, has been important, and each woman tries to encourage others. There is an egalitarian approach to art; anyone can be a writer. This does not preclude a concern with craft and skill, and each author works hard at improving her writing, according to her own criteria.

There is a sense of having to find things out for themselves. Using public libraries has often been an important part of this process. The books they have found have often focused on stories of women and men becoming writers, often despite severe obstacles and hardships. There are differences, however, between the stories of Charles Dickens, Jennifer Wilde, James Joyce and Maya Angelou, and the reasons why each woman was likely to have read and enjoyed these writers is to be found in their social and psychic backgrounds.

This concern with stories of people becoming writers is part of a more general interest in autobiography and

biography. Each woman is writing autobiography in a broad sense; she is engaged in self-writing. Writing is used to work through and make sense of episodes and issues, however painful this process may be. Marilyn finds the attempt to cover certain issues in story form "like suicide" [A2:71:8-9]. To avoid this pain becoming destructive, she uses the form of poetry to "condense" [A2:71:11] and analyse, rather than simply relate. Each woman hopes that her writing may help other women to confront and deal with issues in their own lives. Writing is therefore part of a personal and social survival kit.

The autobiographical stories the women tell or write also present a challenge to both mainstream and feminist theories of autobiography. To oppose the Gusdorfian notions of linear progress and representativeness of an age, some feminist theorists have built a model of "women's" autobiography, based on ideas of understatement, connectedness with others and a concern with the personal. The danger here is of essentialism, of ignoring important differences between women in order to construct a sense of commonality. "Real" lives, and the autobiographical stories based on them are far more messy, more complicated than a single model would allow. The varieties of ways in which these women have approached the task of writing their lives demonstrates both the complexities of their lives and the varieties of models available to them in the telling of them.

Doreen is reluctant to use the word "therapy" to describe her writing, since this is generally used as a criticism of working-class and women's writing. The therapeutic can, however, be conceived of as one function among many that writing may serve for the writer or reader. Others include communication, the pleasures of creation, self-assertion and social transformation. Writing is valued for the effects it has, both on the self and on others.

Part of the attraction of the autobiographical and biographical modes is that they allow the claim to be made that these lives and stories really do matter, in the face of a society which claims that they do not. Marsha wants to record the "great people" [A4:170:23] who would otherwise be neglected. It allows a sense of putting the self into writing: "This is me. I've got something to say" [A1:32:24-26]. Linked to this purpose is that of understanding. The telling of stories is in this sense a creation of knowledge, about the self and the world, and knowledge is power, leading to the possibility of change.

The preceding chapters have demonstrated the ways in which an individual sense of self is built up from the materials to hand, including books and magazines read from childhood onwards. Themes culled from reading are reworked and transformed through the writing process. Reading gives us ways of thinking about ourselves and a set of explanatory models for how the world works. When we come to write, therefore, it gives us both themes and models for how to

go about writing, and a set of traditions to write ourselves into.

In asserting what writing can do for people, I do not wish to privilege literacy in a way which devalues orality. I believe, however, that it is possible to say that there are things that you can do with writing that are different to the purposes of orality, without necessarily implying a hierarchy. In a writers' group, orality tends to be the medium through which the written is shared. It is also important to note, however, that we live in a culture which privileges the written, particularly the printed, word.

Writing is an important means of externalising thoughts, since they are transferred to another medium, given a form and no longer have to be stored in the memory. There is then a choice of whether or not to make the words public. Although it loses immediacy, writing gives time for reflection; it can be put away, returned to, changed or left unaltered. It can be for the self in a way that story-telling, which automatically implies a listener, cannot.

While I have developed my arguments with reference to a group of working-class women, they have a wider application than simply to this particular group. The crucial point here is the need to situate any reader. This argument has a parallel in Suzanne Scafe's [1989] conten-

tion that all literature taught in schools should be contextualised, not only Black literature, thereby enriching the study of language and literature, and refusing to mark one particular group of writers as "different". It seems now that the most interesting directions in which this research could develop would be either to broaden it to include greater numbers or very different social groups, or to take one single case study and pursue it to a much greater depth. Each case study has the potential for this, since the numbers of issues each generates is endless.

This proliferation could be a metaphor for the research process itself. I explained in the introduction how the questions for the thesis had grown out of work done in my M. A. year. It seems now that like an autobiographical story, a piece of research has no neat and obvious ending, but is a spiral of never-ending questions. Answers are always provisional, for the moment. Standpoint epistemology is again a useful way of conceptualising this, since a standpoint is always in itself a construct, created for the purposes of the moment.

As I do need to draw a line, however, I will end by summarising my main arguments. Every reader reads differently, bringing a specific combination of social and personal factors to bear. These factors also shape the writing process, leading to the creation of texts in which the self is written through a re-writing of the dominant

stories of our society. Writing serves a multiplicity of purposes for each writer; the process has aspects which may be described as creative, therapeutic and cognitive. It is, above all, concerned with the creation of meaning.

"We're Telling Each Other Stories All The Time": Narrative
and Working-Class Women's Writing

in Two Volumes

Volume Two

Liz James

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University of Warwick

Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Women's Studies

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations and symbols have been used in the transcripts and quoted in the text:-

Laughter	[L]
Pause	[P]
Rustling of paper	[R]
Self-interruption	[.]
Silence while reading	[S]
Word or words unclear	[?]
Um, er, etc., voice trails off	[...]
Background noise edited	[....]

Appendix 1: Interview 1: Kate

I Introduction

I interviewed Kate in her own home, a council flat in the north of Manchester, in the spring of 1989, having met her at a session of the women writers' group at Commonword. Margaret Thatcher had been returned for her third term, and Thatcherism provides the fuel for many of Kate's "asides". Committed to fighting poverty, particularly child poverty, Kate has since joined the Labour party. The interview took an hour and three-quarters to complete.

The range of language used by Kate during the interview is fascinating and could alone provide enough material for a thesis. It demonstrates the number of languages "ordinary" people have at their disposal, and are able to use, even, or perhaps especially, in such unfamiliar situations as an interview. The speaking self here is a self-on-display, concerned to put on the best possible front, and so uses languages not used in everyday speech. Kate uses the languages of everyday conversation, of Salford dialect of the 20s and 30s, of Christianity and the Bible, of writers' groups, of psychoanalysis and popular psychology. An interesting "reading" could also be made of her speech errors and hesitations, which may be taken to indicate particular ways of thought. Space and time, however, did not allow me to do this.

II Transcript

Right, so can I start by asking you a bit about your home background - I know this might be a bit difficult for you, but -

Oh, you want to know from my childhood.

and take it through.

Yes.

Right now when you were at home, did your parents do much reading, or later on the other people that brought you up? Well, I never knew my father. My mother was always working
10 to support me. She used to leave me with an aunt or my grandmother, my Catholic grandmother. Well I was, I adored my mother, adored her. She was beautiful, she was talented and well known. She was kind to me. She loved me. Disciplined me, but she loved me. Now when she died my world collapsed, because when she used to have to leave me with my gran or with an aunt, whichever was the case may be, I used to be very upset and the first thing I used to do was run away. I was always running away down drainpipes, the lot, you know. Many a time in the early hours of the
20 morning when I was about six I'd run into the arms of a policeman, cos then a child could be out at all [hours] and no one thing would ever happen to it in those days. [.....] And I used to run away and then they'd get in touch with my grandmother and then I'd have the cheek to ask her for fish and chips. [L] Life was Mum and I, that's all that mattered to me. A bit on the spoilt side. And she

died. I was taken to live with my brother's wife. He, my brother, was in the army and I went down from Timperley, living at Timperley, to Salford.

Now that itself was a big you know, jump - different environment altogether - but as I was to learn later these people formed a lot of my character. They were the salt of the earth. Poor people. In some cases people that didn't get enough to eat, in some cases where children ran about barefoot, in many cases where children were molested. All
10 the evils that are here today were there then you know. Well for all that, children were poor and [?] men and women despite the hardships they went through the fundamental things of life that goes to make a decent person of you were taught me. Looking back, one would wonder how children - I'm going back to 20, 1927, late 1920s - how they did survive. Amongst younger children the mortality rate was very high, cos obviously there wasn't the same standard of care then that there is now in the health service. Doctors were paid sixpence a week, you know, if
20 they were lucky off bills and you, people used their own remedies. But by far and large at that time I couldn't see it. I was desparately unhappy, my world had collapsed. I couldn't see this, I wasn't to see it until later on. This was the strengthening. I wanted to run away.

Now during those early years I was brought into [?] people that were quite willing to molest a child. I was brought very near to that but I don't think that it ever happened

to me. Nearly but not quite. I learned to be wary of men because in my childish mind at ten you don't know that men are bad, you don't know, and when a man used to say, perhaps a member of the family as it was, "Come and sit on my knee", warning bells, you know, ring. But you don't think any thing about it. It isn't until they start to touch the body that you edge away. So all that is present today was present there, but the powers that be [?] to do something about it and this that they are calling out at, 10 this abuse of children now is nothing new, only that we're touching the tip of the iceberg. There are many thousands of little children, not only they are are they abused bodily you can be abused mentally as far as can be named.

Well I, the people that took me, she was, as I learned to call Gran, she was, I don't know where she originated from, I think it was Wolverhampton, she was a bargee. Now I don't know if you - oh you know what a bargee is, right. She lived on the canals and she used to say that she had ten children, seven at sea and three ashore, that was the 20 saying, you know. So her husband was the same, so were all her friends, very much the gypsy style. They dressed very much like the gypsies. But she was very remarkable, she couldn't read or write but here she was gifted with the understanding of births, marriages and deaths because I've [?] many babies, when I was eighteen or nineteen years of age I was helping boil the water and that for many babies born and when you come to think about it our, we had a nurse, yes, a midwife, but she was very friendly with the

bottle so half the time she'd be kettled as we call, well no-one would say, is it still going? Oh well you'll get my language [L] (1) And that was it, as happened in those days you see.

Salford was a very colourful place. No wonder so many northern people have become famous. Because they lived the humour, they lived the pathos, they lived the poverty, they lived it all. They didn't have to research it. It was there. I mean one famous author Walter Greenwood, Love on
10 the Dole, now that was world - became a world famous play, but it didn't suit a lot of Salfordians and one night in out of Hankey Park, which was little streets with little terraced houses, you know, just like the street that I lived in, they got hold of him and give him two black eyes. They did. There's not a lot of people know that. But Edna O'Brien, which became a very famous authoress, now Edna used to work in Salford. She was an Irish girl. [?] once or twice, I've seen her, you know, I imagine she's very nice. Coronation Street, it is now getting on the
20 rest of the country's nerves, not because of the programme but because they don't want to know how the people, they don't want to know what it represents. Much of Coronation Street does not represent us as we are now, but it does a lot and I love it, partly because one or two of the stars I've met. Elsie Tanner I was very friendly with, you know, and one or two, you can go, you can meet them in Market Street, you can meet them anywhere. But I think I can say, taking Coronation Street out that that was the kind of

life I was brought up in from being nine to twenty-eight years of age. Very disciplined I was. I worked at Dickie Haworth's (2) when I was eighteen.

And boyfriends, I wasn't particularly bothered about that you see, because I'd had one or two nasty experiences. Had I but known then, that was when the seeds of perhaps a disadvantage with men was born. To this present day I'm not very happy in the company of men. I'm a lot better than I used to be. I have to be very careful telling this
10 because I'm more at home with women but in this day and age if anybody was to hear that they may think I tended towards lesbianism or something like that, of which in all fairness and honesty I don't understand and I keep well away from the subject. I would not like to be questioned on it because I know nothing at all about it, but it just doesn't strike me as right. That's my opinion. So one has to be very careful, you know.

I did have one or two boyfriends in the later years and then I met my husband in Evesham. He was an army man, man
20 of the world. What a naive little creature he must have thought me. We married. I was twenty-eight years of age then. All was well for a few months. He'd been married before and [...] bless him, he's dead now. But the things he did in that marriage, it's only now that I, whether I'll be able to write about it I don't know. The ways that he learnt, the things that he would have liked to have practiced with me which I abhorred [...]. He'd been abroad a

lot, obviously. He knew things that I'd never, never, never dreamt of anything like that. But if I hadn't've stood firm, heaven knows what he would have turned me into. But there again the Lord stepped in again. I was a good wife. I was a good mother but it was not enough for him. He tormented the children, he led the children a dog's life but my youngest daughter put him on a pedestal, you know. To her, he was the tops. Who was I? She knew what was going on, still does now. My eldest daughter knew
10 but he was their father you see, and who was I, even though the hell that I was going through and that they were going through. Which brings you to the point of children being so reluctant to tell strangers of what is happening to them, the loved father and mother, because to a child your dad and mam are the world. Brothers and sisters are - but Dad and Mum are the world. So you see I can understand, I listen to these social people on about abuses and I think, you've no idea, you don't understand. That is they make an issue of it. The simple point is you
20 cannot place into a child's mind the seed of disloyalty, cos that's what it is [?] and that is the cause why many, many cases will go unhidden, (3) you know. Many, many cases of this.

I also valued friendship and loyalty, integrity, still do. Integrity means a lot to me. Without it there's not much hope for us. We cannot trust if somebody won't keep their word. Sadly it's no doubt, you know, that's democracy. Avarice and greed is the common seed in this day and age

and if you don't generate what the media want then they don't want to know. Which brings you down to why do women write? They don't really want to know.

Is it to put down - to try and see if someone if we're fortunate enough to get our work published that someone will read and think, you know, we ought to have [?] on that, this is right. Is it to express ourselves? We can't do it any other way. We haven't got the money and what have you. A wealthy person could write seven hundred and
10 thirty pages about Picasso, she's married to a millionaire, and only two pages be true and she's got away with it and made a fortune [?]. So this is the only way and I think that women are crying out on paper to put down what they feel.

Right, can I ask you also a bit about your education.
Education?

Where did you go to school and what was it like?

I went to school, an elementary school, called Trafford Road Girls' School in Salford and I loved it. I shone at
20 most subjects except arithmetic but I had a healthy respect for my teachers. I never wanted to go home from school. I loved school because there was the escape from the hell of a childhood that I was experiencing. They put themselves out for me. They took me away like they used to take some of the girls away for the weekend down to [Haworth] (4) but they took me away. And I also found out, they found it out for me, I possessed it but didn't know,

that I had a beautiful singing voice. And they developed it and then approached the people I was living with for me to have my voice trained, but it was out of the question. Out of the question, obviously. They didn't have time for niceties like that. They didn't know the role of music. Because music is like life, music and love go together. Without beautiful music [?].

10 So by far and large my school days were happy ones. I got the occasional cane, you know, once or twice, but they were happy ones. And life hadn't altered at all, in fact it got worse. I was [?] as I grew up. There was nothing unusual about me. I grew up very like my mum. There was nothing very unusual, I wasn't, I never counted myself an attractive child. There was nothing very, well I don't think so, very attractive or outgoing about me at all. But I always, I never met with, well I don't know they say some women do bring out the worst in men. Whether it was my ability to try and keep myself, I knew one thing that it was wrong to have a child before marriage, that was the
20 norm. I had a vague idea obviously what went on, but I probably could never give you see, because of the suppression. This is what suppression does to you - it stays with you all your life if you've had a childhood like that, like mine, and this is what my husband spotted, and he thought he could mould me to what he wanted but he didn't. He damn near broke my spirit in the process but in the finish I up and left him and come up here. [P] Oh and as I said it was a matter of survival, you know.

So education, yes well I was educated. I did take myself to night school by the way. I'd to creep out to go because I wanted to be a nurse but there again you had to pay to go into nursing in those days, I'm going back in the early 1930s now. One had to pay for nursing and of course they wouldn't. I did learn, later, that my father did send money for me. Now in all fairness I must say that up to this present day [.] my father, like my mother, came from a very good family. They're still around in Altrincham and
10 Timperley and happily today are very well known people. Now a few weeks ago I got the idea into my head that I would like a photograph of him, so I wrote. They came, but they came while I was out. They didn't tell me, I didn't get the photograph. I've since wrote. But four years ago I put an advertisement in the Evening News, and they saw it, they came to see me. Oh, they came to see me, what I was like, what kind of a person I was, but I was like him. He was a good man. So evidently I've inherited the traits from Mum and Dad. He was a policeman actually but during
20 the First World War he worked in the British Intelligence, you know, when it was British Intelligence, it's a free for all now. So evidently there were decent traits. But this is the age old story, if my mum was married when she had me, you know, but she too suffered the same way to a certain extent, but not as badly as I did, with a man. You see we didn't understand. God knows what she went through. I don't really know, you know, the family's never told me. But as I said, the education, [P] I come out with no

special qualifications, there wasn't qualifications then, because in the latter days of my school I took diphtheria so of course I was in hospital, you know, and then went back to school. I got better and then of course as soon as I was able to be on my feet that year in the January I started work in the mill.

Were you encouraged to read and write though when you were at school? Did the teachers encourage you?

Oh I was encouraged to read and write but I couldn't do it
10 at home. See it was bucket and scrubbing brush and errands you see unless you got, I got in the corner and if you got in a corner with a book it was "a bookworm", the book was either taken off you [...] you see that's where I lost out, the finer things of life were denied me. I was nothing more or less than a drudge and I know that. You see there was nothing that a young person as timid as I was, oh I thought of running away but who could I run to? You see your kind, and so many girls that were in my position, the best thing that could have happened to me when I lost my
20 Mum was to have been put in a home. There I might have had a chance to have got acquainted with these things. You see as I was fixed I had no chance. And when this person that looked after me, no I looked after myself really, when she died I went to live with her daughter.

Now during these years that I'd lived with Gran Warren I'd also lived with her youngest son who, through no fault of his own, had either been tampered with before he was born,

they said that it was due to needles, was paralysed and had the mentality of a child. He was disfigured, poor lad, and he had three rows of teeth, you know. And imagine seeing something like that at nine years of age. See I also had to deal for all that, he was a man. I also had to be very wary and deal with sexual subversions. So I always had to be aware of what might happen. So the point was probably on sex which in those times, which left its mark by giving me a kind of revulsion and not knowing why I'd
10 got this revulsion. Only now, since I'm writing my life story am I finding out why I am as I am.

Which I still believe that marriage is a wonderful institution [P] and that if you trot around everybody, now don't misunderstand me, I don't mean any offence, but relationship after relationship can surely not do a lot of good, you know. I think you need to make, whether married or not, I think you need to make a valid relationship, one that would last, you know what I mean? That will take you, that you will value each other and the children that may
20 come along and I think that marriage is a wonderful institution and that many thousands of British people have been married fifty, sixty, or a hundred years or one thing and another! But then in this modern society that is a point for the individual, you know. I don't look down upon marriage [?] I have had the chance to marry since I've been older. I wouldn't risk it. I'm pretty set in my ways and you know, I mean I probably wouldn't be now as willing to give and take as I used to be. Normally I would give in

and say, "Oh, O.K.", you know, "Somebody's right, that's it, I must be wrong." But I now value my own opinions, now, you know. I value, oh what are you, there is an old saying, "When you are a child, see, give me the mind of a child of seven and I will give you the man or woman" and I think that's true to a certain extent I really do. [P]

Sometimes I feel that I haven't produced very much in my life. People that I've spoke - I've never opened up about my life except, it's thanks to Liz Ferguson that I do now, 10 she encouraged me. I have never, never opened up about my life, so people don't know, you know, only the people that were around me and they weren't too handy or too pleased at the thought that I'd had a hard life, you know, there are some people (5) that because it throws a reflection on them - they know that at certain times in my young life they could have stepped in and said, "Look, this is wrong!" But they didn't and they don't like being reminded of that. Even my own family don't know and this has become, as I say, if ever this book, if ever [with 20 emphasis] it does, I don't know if it will or not, it might not be important enough, I should have to change names and I should have to write under a pen name which, legally, is not unlawful. You can write under a pen name. Because what my family would do knowing of my very early life, they know that I had a hard life, I just don't know. But it might put a lot into place. [P] [?] why my mam was like that, after what she went through as a child, you see, So they know I'm writing it and my son only rang me

on what's today, Friday, Thursday, Wednesday night, just as I'd come in from writing class and he, I happened to tell him and he said, "I think it'll be a horror story, won't it Mum?" You see, so I said, "Well, it's all going down", I said, "every bit". He said, "Good for you", but he has no idea what it is. He has no idea, all the lot, the good, the bad, the people, the people I respected, the people I got to know, the people that I grew up with. But there were some smashing people in Salford. Salford
10 people are smashing, even though there's good and bad in everything. But they were the salt of the earth, share their last tuppence with you.

Did anybody tell you stories when you were a child?

My mum.

Can you remember them?

Well she used, it was mostly nursery rhymes, you know. I can remember one ocassionally that if, you know, you didn't behave yourself that there were bad things in the world that could happen to you, you know, but I'd only be
20 about seven then. Mostly stories, and she'd add a bit on to them. As I said, she was very talented. She was a talented violinist, nice dancer, beautiful woman, she really was, but all the family were. They were all attractive people but my mum was lovely. She had auburn hair and it was long, large grey eyes and a beautiful complexion and in those days they used to wear a bustle, you know [?] My mother was a beautiful woman. My father, my father, I never knew him. I did meet him once and I

just remember a tall, very, a dark man, very, very tall, six foot odd, but then again he would, you had to be six foot to be in the police station those years. They take them shorter now.

Yes, my mum did tell me a lot of stories and she used to take me a lot of walks round Timperley, Cheshire and she had an umbrella with a handle on, you know those umbrellas, and I was very fond of rhododendrons [?] and passionately fond of flowers I am. Music, we went to
10 Blackpool. She used to take me round the ballroom dancing. I was always dressed beautifully, you know. She was the kind of woman that people turned round to have a look at and I can see her now, very, very clearly. She worked so damned hard, you know, and the trade, well she had me but my father did help and I believe at a certain time after my mum died he wanted to take me but these people that I was with on account of the money didn't want that to happen, you see, so he didn't get the chance. I would have grown up entirely different. I still read about my
20 father's family in the local newspaper, you know, and apart from my birthright I'm not at all ashamed of the fact that I was illegitimate. It was not my fault. Looking back at my mum being attractive and circumstances, that how many of us have got that battle, you know. In the eyes of God each child means, you know, the same to him but he does dwell on marriage, but marriage in our church is for time and eternity. It doesn't end with death, it's for time and eternity. Now I will never be able to do that you

see, and so that will be perhaps a bar to obtaining the Celestial Kingdom. Because there is more than one kingdom, there is three, the Celestial, the Terrestrial and the Telestial, which is very like the one that we live in now.

Can you remember any particular stories that she told you, were they fairy stories, or did she make them up?

Ah Cinderella, Cinderella was one. [P] Oh, two children in a garden, that was one. No, I can't remember the very words. It was like a secret garden. You shut the gate and
10 all kinds of things happened to you, good things. The flowers were of a different hue, you know. Stories of little animals. If I looked hard enough I'd see a fairy. [P] Yes, that she did a lot, take me to the woods she used to do, looking for fairies. If a little creature moved, that was a little elf, little elves, and up to being thirty years of age I used to take a little a little boy I knew through the woods - I lived in Evesham - and take him looking for elves he used to say, "Going looking for elves, we are", [L] you know, elves and goodness knows
20 what. [.....] [L] Elves and goodness knows what. Fairies, I believed in fairies. Peter Pan and Wendy. And even now I could take myself in imagination to the woodlands, put the woodland people into adult situations, you know, didn't I get one with Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Johnson with rabbits. Oh that was a good one! I got that muddled up a bit at the finish actually. [L] (6)

Yes, all those and I'm still a kid at heart. In fact some-

times I think I've got the ability to get out of the world to a certain extent. I've still got imagination, maybe it is a good thing. I can still get out of the daily life without losing the value of it. By that I don't mean to say I can daydream and everything goes but I think I've got that ability which perhaps cushions life a lot for me. I see so many people looking so worried, you know, they look as if they've got the world on their shoulders and yet I make it that I can manage, you know, a smile. It
10 doesn't matter how I'm feeling. Cos you owe it to yourself and to those that you live with. No-one wants to listen to a miserable person. Cry and you'll cry alone, smile and the world smiles with you.

But it's very difficult, especially for young people, in this day and age because of the pressure. You've got your pressure in different ways than we had because of wanting to get on and set yourselves up in life. We had the pressures and the evils that are here as well, so you've got a double pressure, you young people, I think so. It
20 doesn't matter how well equipped you are to deal with it, you've got a lot to deal with and you may disagree with me there but you, you have. All young, all people, all society has got a lot to deal with and I think we're safe in saying that we lived through the best part. We had nothing but we had everything. We could see things that are going, that the younger generation have not come to yet. We can't visualise what it'll be like when they get to our age, we will no longer be here. We will be in the

other kingdom [?]

Yes, stories played a great part with Mum and I but they stopped abruptly when she died. There was nothing like that after that. There was no music. The only music I got was at school and I took part in all the historical things that went on in Salford, you know, we had pageants and what have you. I was in all those, in all the operas, in all the musical events. That was the good part of my life. I used to, when I got older I used to save up and go to
10 see all that was going on in Manchester. I developed a great love for the Halle, which I still have, and when I get the chance and I can afford it I love to go and listen and hear the Halle. I have been in the church choir for seven years, been all over the show singing [?] strong choir and in that a lot of the, how can I put it, a lot of the humdrum of daily life, I can lose myself in three or four hours music wherever we are. And also the ability to sing praises to the Lord, you know, because there are some beautiful hymns and there's some beautiful songs outside
20 the church which I really like and there's a lot I think he likes in hearing songs of [?] So yes, stories have made [...]

Do you have a particular favourite?

Do I have a particular favourite? Hmm [P] I don't really know. There was so many of them. Cinderella I think. Maybe perhaps Cinderella because she reminded me of a bit of me. Perhaps Cinderella. Peter Pan and Wendy, the ability to

fly off, the ability to transport oneself from surroundings. Not a bad thing that you know, to transport yourself, you can transport yourself anywhere, you know. But also it hasn't stopped me from facing - I do face up to things that happen to me. I've no props to fall back on. anxiety and stress, I see it through in my own way which strengthens me, I suppose, inwardly. There's no tranquilisers to fall back on, there's no smoking, there's no drinking, there's no cup of tea to fall back on. I've got
10 to sit or stand or work or through my daily life and see myself on through those situations just the same as the good Lord. I think that part of my life also taught me as well the ability to make decisions cos I've been making decisions from being ten years of age.

See what was lacking in my life after I lost my mum was love. Romance is a thing I would never be able to write about. I might be able to put a story together about two people but I couldn't write about it because I never knew it, I don't know what it's like. And you know it's a
20 terrible thing to have lived your life without love. I have the love of my children, I hope so, I'm sure I have and perhaps to a certain extent my husband loved me, but his love was mostly satisfying his own needs. He'd come from a big family, he'd had a rough life but he had the companionship of brothers and sisters which makes a difference. My brother was forever away in the army, I never knew him properly you see. So I was left like something trying to grow in a garden of weeds and the

weeds were choking it all the time. There was no love. As I reached each stage and grew up there was nobody I could turn to for questions, only a friend. If they laughed at me it put me down altogether. I was extremely timid and putting it quite bluntly, one wonders how people like me survive. Why don't we try suicide or something like that? But we don't try that ever. Why do we go on when the darkness is so thick that there's no glimmer of light at all? Why do we overcome being exploited by so many people
10 in our life and yet come out moderately decent human beings, decent citizens? I've a great loyalty towards my country and I love my country very much and I love my Queen. There's some of the hangers on I don't like but the Queen, I think she's marvellous, you know. I couldn't imagine England without a ruler and by that I mean the monarchy. I have a great respect for people that write good things.

Do you have any favourite books now though as an adult?

Well to be honest with you I don't read an awful lot but
20 some of the great - I have flicked through some of the world wide authors and one authoress, Jackie Collins, is one. To me her books are nothing but other people's misfortunes and misdeeds but she can make ten million for three books, it's what the media want. The works of, well I don't understand the works of Tolstoy, but I have gone through a little of them. Shakespeare, except Richard III and that's a bit heavy for me. [L] I've sat through Richard III because when I lived in Stratford I was able

to go to the theatre on complimentary tickets, you know, and I knew a lot of the people that worked behind the scenes. To me fame is not a tangible thing, it's something that is elusive, you cannot grasp it. Favourite books, well one of my favourites, who else but Charlotte Bronte and Wuthering Heights (7). There you've got Cathy's spirit and the way which I think was how the Brontes, how Charlotte Bronte lived. I think that had very much to do with her own life. Charles Dickens' Tale of Two Cities,
10 David Copperfield. I've read David Copperfield, I've read it dozens of times.

I remember when I was going to Europe with a cousin of mine and I was on, we travelled overnight - I feel as though I must tell you this, because it'll perhaps give you an insight - and we were going up the Dover road. It was coming dawn. We were going on the morning ferry you see as, well, you know European time is different to ours, they're always I think an hour ahead, either an hour back or an hour ahead, and we were going up the Dover road and
20 Dover and, you know, and everything like that and suddenly I said to George who was driving and I said, "I wonder if Betsey Trotwood's cottage was in this farm?" [?] "Betsey Trotwood's cottage? What are you talking about, Kate?" Our Doreen says to me, "I know what she's on about, David Copperfield", cos she'd read it once or twice. I could see Betsey Trotwood's cottage, I could see the open sea, I could see [...] I just wondered why I'd made that remark, I don't know. But Charles Dickens, The Bronte sisters,

what's the other one that's always been my favourite David Copperfield, oh Charles Dickens' Old Curiosity Shop and what have you have always been my favourites, they always will be.

Why is that do you think?

Well Charles Dickens, he was a man far ahead of his time. Did it perhaps identify with my childhood? I think it did. Perhaps that's why. David Copperfield, his mother died, he had a step-mother, they treated him cruelly, and then he
10 went to his Aunt Betsey Trotwood and finally his Aunt Betsey managed to gain control of him and from then on life wasn't too bad. She educated him and he turned out fine [P] [?] a sheltered existence as life then was just the same as in the Victorian times, was the same evils towards children and women as there is now. [P] It was dreadful. Only now thanks to the enlightened people who are trying [?] So there you, you have the books. Present day books, I've read a little of Jeffrey Archer but he doesn't interest me. But that's only my opinion. Jane
20 Eyre, I think I'm mostly touching on the classics. But Shakespeare, Shakespeare, his plays, his writings.

When did you get into that then?

In Stratford. In Stratford. Everything's Shakespeare there. I mean to say he did, the school where he went, it'll fall down any day, it'll, they're suring it up, you know, it'll fall down any day. Well, you've been to Stratford haven't you? The theatre, which can transport

your mind back to Shakespearian days and there you've got Falstaff and who have you and all the rest of them, you know. Othello, oh to watch Othello on the stage, especially to watch Orson Welles. Did you ever see Orson Welles in Othello? Oh he was [?] Othello and Desdemona, Romeo and Juliet, you know, and all the many, many works of Shakespeare you see, did [.] and then Charles Dickens and Alexander Dumas, Tale of Two Cities and The Count of Monte Cristo. See there you are again was the, well not so much
10 the child, but in The Count of Monte Cristo there was a young man you see, blamed for what he didn't do, put in prison, but there again came the, you know, the revelation.

So, but modern day books, I've read one or two. I must say I've got no time for these magazines and of course I've a lot of books, we get a lot of books in church, with a lot of stories but they are true stories, you know. I'm afraid now I don't do a lot of outside reading apart from those books. I've still got David Copperfield, Charles Dickens
20 and the classics of that day and what was the other one, Nicholas Nickleby. I've still got those but maybe, just maybe, I identify with them. Maybe that's why. Mother told me, Mum told me a lot of stories about animals and children and stories, the ordinary classic, you know, fairy stories, Grimms fairy tales and all that, Hans Christian Anderson. Yes all those that I still hold. Those are the books that I would choose to read, put it that way. So I will never gain a fundamental knowledge of

society as it is because I'm not very happy with what's going on in society apart from music and what [...] the composers, Beethoven, it's always been a marvel to me how he managed to write when he was so disorientated. Bach, Liszt, all the, you know, the various composers. Mendel-son, Handel's Messiah. Who could not sit and listen to the Halleluiah, transported with that. Music, it's like a painting. A painting carries a message and the painting portrays it, something. A thing of beauty is a joy forever
10 [?] but those are my favourite books, those are my favourites.

Right. What about television? Do you watch -

Oh I do watch it. I do watch Coronation Street. There I transport myself into a time, cos I know it's just like, it's as authentic as it can possibly be. But I'm afraid it - it is dramatised obviously but it is also authentic- I'm afraid that will go very soon. Documentaries, [P] customs and ways of other people in the world. I like that cos I like to travel. I would have liked to have travelled
20 more extensively.

Russia, the Russian people, I'm very much of Mikhail Gor-bachov at the moment because I think he'll turn out to be one of the greatest leaders the world has ever known, but what people must remember is that he's got to get eighty years of old diehards off his shoulders, he's going very carefully, if he steps too briskly [P] He's already cleared a lot of them out and I think then they'll have a

very moderate [...] All is not bad in Russia. They've got the same problems that we have.

I like to watch a documentary about the tribes of the world, other peoples, other races, other cultures, what makes them tick. I've also, I've dabbled a little bit in trying to make, I did make one or two friends in the House of [...] in Princes Road. Chinese - they are a people and they were in [...] well they've got the right idea, you know, they also, their ancestry, their geneology, you've
10 got two thousand years there at least. Those are the things that we need to do. Those are the things that a lot of people would become interested in, the culture not whether they've got the latest pop music, you know. I like the pop, I like classical music, I like any music that I can hear what they are saying but if it's "wh, wh, wh, wh", I don't want to hear it. [L]

Television, I only watch the programmes that I want to watch, it's mostly [...] If there's a good serial on, you know, alright, I'll try to watch it, if I don't like it
20 I'll switch it off, you've got your button, you can switch off. Mine's only a black and white by the way, you know, but it's a television. It's what I can afford and one great thing that I do believe in is living within your means. I've cultivated the idea through my life, this is one of the things I've been brought up, how I was brought up, taught the value of money. You never had anything if you couldn't afford it, you know, you worked for every

penny that you had. If you hadn't got it you didn't have it. Like food - if you didn't eat what was put down to you then it was put down to you until you did eat it. So you very quickly learned to go [?] right [?] I'm going hungry. You got nothing else and it wasn't all that, a bad thing. Those type of people which was our generation brought their children up, well maybe not quite that harsh, but brought their children up with the same values from mother to daughter [?] so it wasn't such a bad thing. It was bad, 10 the abuse side of it was bad, yes, but it helped to form character and so to equip you for life. I'd have never have stood up to one half of what I've stood up to, I'd never have took that, I know I wouldn't have done, and I'd have just ended it all. It gave me strength, strength to go on despite the [?] Oh, I think that's all I can tell you about my uneventful life. [L]

How about how about films?

Films?

Yes, do you like films?

20 Well, I like Biblical films providing they stick to the point as much as possible. I don't go to see many films. I do like the occasional romance, but only if it's not too sloppy, cos if it's too sloppy I'm off out. Ah, ah I cannot stand these pornographics that's another thing. There's no soft pornography to me, it's all the same. It's all there because there's millions to be made out of it. No, I do not like that. But I like art. I like to go in a museum and see a pot figure. The human body is a work of

art. Nobody should be ashamed of their body, it's how the media exploited them. This is how we are made and I fully, I mean to me a spade is a spade, you know, you name things as they are if you're talking about that particular subject. And art in its form. Somebody on the BBC now and I can't understand it, art is a lovely thing. It is the way it's exploited that makes it appear dirty you see. I mean the it's like sex, the act between a man and a woman that truly love each other and value each other is a
10 wonderful thing, but it's what is made of it.

I see a lot of people where these women are on the streets, prostitutes, that's been a thing from the year one and it will be here till the year two. Because that's the way until the Lord comes and [?] the world. That will remain. They are a necessary evil. Not enough is taught about them to make sure that like in Europe they have places, I don't know whether you're aware of it or not, they have registered, especially in Germany, they have registered brothels. I expect they had to do that during
20 the war, you know, and all that kind of thing, where those girls, they had a list of girls and they were compelled to go in once a month to be examined. In that way they checked the diseases. Do you know what they've got now? But they haven't educated people. I am not against those people. In some cases they've got to do it. It's something in their make-up. I was very friendly with one in my younger days. There was many a child with good cause to thank her for a pair of shoes. She'd never see a child

without a pair of shoes. She was one of the most generous hearted girls I've ever come in contact with. She made a wonderful marriage at the finish. Honestly. For all, but for all, no, I'd, I [.]

Ah adventures, adventures, you know, I like a good adventure, a thriller. Films about animals, oh yes. I've had more enjoyment, well not, well enjoyment in a way, watching these three whales. Now that's another thing struck me which might not have struck a lot of people.

10 American, Russian, in position, territorial waters, everybody worked hand in hand. This was only on Robin Day's Question Time. That's a programme I like. I like to hear the answers, you know. And why can't the politicians do that? Now, you've got a group of children with enough information, but politicians, put them round the table, there'd be no wars or anything. But they can't because of their greed, you know. I bet there's more biting of nails among our top politicians now that Mrs. Thatcher's said she's going on for another ten years. And that will bring
20 them their downfall because they'll get fed up, cos she's put the old boot boys out of the way and they'll get fed up with it you see, and sooner or later as soon as ever she can that'll be it you see. No, I mean, but it dawned on me with watching that programme about the whales. I am I going on too long?

No, no.

And why, why, how the politicians do that

CHANGE OF TAPE

Upstairs, Downstairs, you know, sagas. There again that relates to Mum and I. I've been in service, so had she. Not quite that early [?] but I knew all about that. If I had to write an episode about that I wouldn't have had to research it. I would have just had to have got the names and places like, you know, because I've been in those kind of houses and believe me there's always been more corruption amongst those type of people. Always, always there's money to [?]. Many years ago the same thing was happening
10 now, the same, you know, wife swapping and what have you was happening amongst the rich. Because the rich have never had to work for their money. It is handed down to them and each generation gets richer. You take the Duke of Westminster, what's he done with his life up to now? What's he done with it? He's just beginning to pull himself together. Spent thousands on drugs [?] course of medication, OK, that would have been fine. No, he had to spend it on drugs and destroy himself. Why, it's one of the oldest families in Britain.

20 And all's not right within the Royal Family at the moment, apart from the Queen, and she's spent thirty odd years our Queen, never put a foot wrong. Cos she's taught those values. But the young people and, there isn't, and the Queen tries, it's all that she can do, to clip their wings. Some of the young people with their money and prestige are bringing disrepute to the Royal Family, but that won't take away from the fact that we have a good Queen. She's the finest ambassadress we've got but I think

in the not too - this again - in the not too distant future I think this government will try to do a republic and do away with her and put Mrs. Thatcher as president. Cos she would dearly like to hold the Queen's position. Where she got that idea from I don't know because she's not of royal blood. That comes from [.] and I wrote and told her that. I said if you've vowed on taking the Queen's place, I said, in case you don't know the fact that crucial ancestry, lineage and birth. Sorry, it's not
10 your style. I didn't get an answer. [L] I got a great deal of satisfaction from putting it down there on what I thought about her and I marked the letter urgent. Yes. Whether she ever got it or not I don't know but oh don't I have a great deal of [?] last night I got it all dawn what I think about them.

I talk to myself a lot. Oh, I talk to myself a lot. I move round here and you know you'd think there was somebody in with me. And I told this to the doctor and he said, "Good for you". He said, "Do you know", he said, "if other
20 people could do that, instead of bottling it up". I said, "Well, I felt I might be going a bit ..." [L] And it was a strange thing, it was some years back and he said, "Well, why don't you put it down on paper". "Ooh", I said, and I thought and it was due to a holiday in the Lake District with my eldest daughter. She took me away for several days and we was at, was it Grasmere, I think it was Grasmere, oh and it was beautiful. It was a beautiful day and we'd just had a shower of rain and the leaves were like large

emeralds, you know, because I don't say the sky is blue, you know, the azure blue. Oh, I can look at the sky, I can see highways, you see, I can see signposts and follow the path, you know. The azure blue of the sky, you know, the soft white clouds, you know. I'll tell you the sky is blue and the clouds are white, white clouds, you know, the trees like emeralds, all the richness of nature, the beauty. And I said to my daughter, "Ooh, it's lovely". She likes the colours. She lives in it, I suppose it doesn't
10 affect her as much you know. "Goodness Mum", she said, "why don't you get [?] paper". [L] I said, "Right, I will". She said, "I'll buy you a notebook", and we did and I started and from then on I thought, right, I'll have a go.

But it's my presentation lets me down, my English. That's why I'm learning English, you see, taking English up (8). So that's all that's keeping me off the scene. He said, "It's your mechanics of writing", that's what he calls it, you know. [L] That's what J. meant by choppy the other
20 day, you know. J. gets very intense when she's giving criticism which is understandable because she tries to put her people's case on paper and I understand that and good for her. But I am only learning and it was due to the fact that we were asked to re-create a scene some weeks back from the past and I put my first day in the mill. I named it and it was "The First Day". Well I glossed it as not a bad day, you know, and when she [Liz] read it she said, "You've not really been honest about that have you, Kate?"

And I said, "Well, no I haven't". She said, "Well why don't you put the truth down". I said, "Alright, you've asked me for the truth, I'll give it", and that's [...] but she's a great inspiration. We sat on Wednesday night and I went through what I'd written and there was another young lady, you know, and she said to me she said, "Ooh, I have enjoyed it". She, see she gives me encouragement. But they are one, there is one particular person that, I don't know why it is, that I'm inclined to dry up. I feel as though
10 she's going to, how can I put it, I might be totally wrong, but she's going to criticise me before I've got anything down to criticise, you know. And there was one like it in the other group. Because I was one of the first members in the Oldham Wordsmiths, that's where I started. In Shaw and [...] but the only point that I give that up for was that it used to take me about two and a half hours to get there and in the winter it's a long while, whereas I'm in town in a few minutes and, you know, I'm back three quarters of an hour earlier. So obviously I couldn't for
20 that. That's the only reason. But there was one there too who didn't seem to give anybody a chance. You get your one. But it's being, it's forgotten once, you see it's being big enough to let it roll off your back, you see. This is me. This is what I'm writing. Because that's the core of writing I think, this is me, be it man or woman, listen to me, I've got something to say. They don't write that but they want you to hear it and read it.

Is that why you chose to write your own story then?

This is me. I am a tiny trillionth of an atom in this great world and I have got something to say, you know, any person that I think is completely [?] I have got something to say which might benefit somebody else. Please listen to me.

So why did you decide to write it as if it was somebody else?

Well, in the mechanics of writing I might have started with "I", it would have been an autobiography. I would
10 have started, put "I", "I", then gone on to something else. If I keep it story fashion every word will be true, the scenes will be true, but there'd be different persons. Also as what I've explained before, on account of my family, I would have had to have used my own name whereas I am at liberty, which I will see later on, I might, because there's a lot, there's reading that's not going to be very pretty still to come. I'm only in the early stages and everything's going down. Now that the floodgates are open I'll write it as it was there in my later life. And
20 it might be a comfort perhaps to others. Somebody might read it and on the other hand they might not think it good enough. Well fair enough, the point is that I've got it down. That's what matters. This is me. I've got it down. I've nothing else very promising to write about. I can't say, "In the days when I was an actress", you know, or something like that. I've nothing behind my name to cause people to sit up and take notice. I'm just an ordinary woman, down to earth woman, that's lived her life to the

best of her ability up to now and that would like to leave p'raps the place a little better towards children than what it is now. Not [?] too much.

I've no mercenary, I've no ultimate goals. I shall be very pleased if it was published, if it was good enough. Very pleased indeed. It would give me great encouragement. But that is not of prime importance. The importance is getting it down, because even after I'm gone somebody might just read it. Who knows, that's up to the Lord. If he thinks,
10 he will help me. If he thought I shouldn't be writing it he would put a stop to it here and now in some way or another. I ask for guidance every day that he will help me to write this and to write it in simple language. P'raps that's why it appears to be choppy, because it's simple language. But as it grows up, as I grow older [...] plus is any child academically, you know, at first? Are they? Well we're all children, we all have to learn to talk properly and what have you. Hence the English class. It's, English is totally different now to what it was when I was at
20 school. [L] Do you know what I've been asked to write?

What?

The sequel to a classic film. Of Mice and Men. Do you know it, that film? With [?] in the final episode and he wants a sequel to it. I said, "Well", I said to him, I said, "You'll be lucky." I'll have a shot. I'll have a go. He said, "And if it doesn't, if it isn't successful what the hell". So I thought, oh well, you know.

So what other kind of writing do you do then apart from the main piece?

Poems.

Do you?

I'm no good, not much good. I did one over loneliness. I came in from the, from Commonword and wrote it that night on loneliness and I don't think I've ever done a poem like that before. I've sent one or two to, well I was asked for a copy for Age Concern and I gave the lady one. Also poems
0 about things as they are, about children and the world. And I've also had two small pieces published.

Oh, where's that?

Well, I don't have a book with me now, my daughter took the last one. It was called The First Edition and it was a combination of nothern women writers from the Oldham Wordsmiths. Mine was a poem about children and the nuclear race and the other one was a true story that happened to me at my daughter's, but I never expected to get them in the book, but they got in which gave me some encourage-
0 ment. The others, I'm very interested in space too. But there I would have to do research. I have wrote one space story about a boy from another planet, you know, he kept coming down, not by your usual spaceship, by a magnetic beam, you know, and I've also wrote a fairly long story about a boy that had a very bad accident, and how faith, you know, came through. But a lot of my work is out.

Now this is what I can't understand, I never get it back. I say I send postal and the, a lady at the [.] oh I was

going to say a little [?] then, [L] silly me, she's at Leeds University, I've got her name down. She came a few weeks back for the writing class and I just, you know, jogged her memory. She said, "It's still in a draw and it hasn't been rejected yet". And I said, "Well, I'd like it back", you know, cos I send postage and everything. All they've got to do is put it back like they do at magazines. I sent a couple up to People's Friend magazine who said it wasn't what they wanted, but when I learnt about presentation after, I wouldn't wonder, I wonder the editor took the trouble, if he did read it, you know, and I taught myself to type. So, but there's a lot of things, you know, that I've got to learn.

So, oh films you were asking me about weren't you. I don't think there's, I don't go to the cinema, you see. Nothing pornography. A good adventure film I like. I do like James Bond. Now to me there's only one James Bond, for me that's Sean Connery. There's no other, not Georgie Moore, he's too chocolate boxy. [L] But I like the James Bond films. It's escapism but then again there's no harm in that. But I do not like films of cruelty, no. I like films of animals, you know. Documentaries, you get some very good ones. And I also like to listen to people that are on the way up, I think it's nice. You do get some very down-to-earth people, like J. B. Priestley when he used to be on, and all those people, you know, now I like to listen to them because they usually say what they like and they don't bother. It don't matter whether you like them or

not, they go on. And I do like to tune into the House of Lords, you know. There you see men that have made mistakes, men who have put mistakes right and who have gone on and gone on you know and I like to listen to them, you know, going on. I have a great [.]

The news. I always try to catch the news. I like to know what's going on in my own country. I like to know what the news is. I don't buy a newspaper. That's another thing, I don't buy a newspaper. That's economy mostly. Well no, 10 really it isn't. I tell you the truth, sometimes I don't have the time to read it. I don't buy a Sunday paper. I read my Scriptures every day. I try to get a chapter of those done because the answers to a lot of things in life are in the Scriptures if we look hard enough for them. But as regards, I just watch what I want to watch. Well anything filth or anything like that no, no. I do, you do get the violence in the news and I go on something alarming, you know, about things that happen. Nobody's doing anything to stop them, like the Northern Ireland, I 20 think that's political purely and it's being kept going. Because what gets to me is this wierdness by the way society accepts violence and what have you. If you watch it a lot, you're going to get saturated with it and the same thing's going to happen to me so I don't watch that cos I don't want to lose the sight that it's wrong and that it shouldn't be happening. I don't want to lose what little integrity there is, I don't want to lose that. It's not much use in the world today, integrity, but to me it

means one hell of a lot.

How about your poems, have you got favourite poets that you've [...]?

Alfred Lord Tennyson. I used to like Byron's. I think it's Tennyson that I'd like. I'm no judge of poets. I only think, you know, "I wandered lonely as a cloud", that sticks in everybody's mind. Well shall I say no. I've sent poems up, I sent a poem up to Nottingham not very long ago. I've sent several poems up, but they've evidently not
10 got anywhere. But I'm no poetess. No, regarding poets, I don't know any of the modern contemporary poets, you know. I, my poetry is how I feel, my own words, you know. I, [R] this was one [R] that's the [...] I often write some and then type a bit, you know. [R] I've got that one. I keep telling, asking, telling, saying to myself [R] I've got them all over the show, bits and pieces, you know. I don't want to take your time up. [R] See I wrote that one not long ago on a little boy that was worried about something and he just runs away from the home, he had a happy home,
20 to see his nan. I wrote that during the hurricane. Remember when the? Well it's nothing very striking. I don't know, I had my hands on the one that was on loneliness the other [R] lot of mistakes on them. I don't know where the loneliness [R] I can go to almost anything but at the moment it'll be this [P] it'll be my life story. Now that was the first, the little marks was what I got when I first showed it, that was the one on loneliness but I altered that a little bit. [R] Those were my own words,

not from anything, anybody else's, you know. As I said,
it's me that's writing. [R] [Silence while I read the
poem] Now read what she put on the back. [S] They wanted,
you gain an idea of what they meant by the mechanics of
writing. I put my capital letters in the wrong places and
all this, but then that's me, that's them.

You can still get the rhythm from it though.

Yes. Cos that's what loneliness does if you can't fight
your way out of it. It does eventually destroy some
10 people, yes, and that is one of the biggest evils of
modern society, lonely people. You can be in a crowd and
be lonely. [R]

*So why do you choose to put some things in poems and other
things in stories?*

I don't really know. That question I can't answer. You, I
can be stood at the window, I can be stood anywhere, I can
be washing up, I can be doing anything and the words,
certain words come to my mind so I put them down. As you
can see I've got pens all over the show. I just put them
20 down, no rhythms, no, and then sort it out at my leisure.

I don't really know why I do that, cos I'm no poetess,
never wrote poetry in my life. Never, never wrote poetry.
The one that was published, I was waiting for my little
grandson, I'd gone to pick him up from school. Now it was
a lovely May day and looking at the sky I thought the
sky's so beautiful and the trees and the little children
coming out of school and it just come. I think if I ever,
well I'm getting feedback now from the group, so that is

what I want, that is fine, you know. I will follow to a certain extent what they say, but if I think it's right that something's in and it deters from me then I will leave it. It's got to be me and if somebody else doesn't like that well then that's just too bad, you know. Like I said to Liz when I started writing this, I said, "It's not going to make pretty reading". She said, "Well, that doesn't matter", you know. I said, "It's not", I said, "and there's times when it's going to be very painful for
10 me to write so you'll just have to bear with me", you know. That's how it goes. I'm hoping I will be, you know, good fortune, good luck to go on with it and complete it. It might take me a while, I'm hoping to complete it, you know.

Is there anybody that you've tried to model your writing on, or do you think it just comes?

No, no. To me they're all, you know, know what they're about. I know Jackie Collins' books I couldn't model mine on. [L] Good gracious me no. Bless her she's [.] and good
20 luck to her and her ten million pounds. Crickey, when that dries up, well she'll have enough to keep her going. See Joan, t'other one, wrote a book. That Dynasty programme I've forgotten at the starting of it, I could never think of the end of it, you know, I mean and [.] ah do you know the only thing I ever got anything out of that was looking at the women's legs. I thought how [?] pairs of legs they've got, you know, [L] for actresses and I used to think to myself, oh that's celebrate, you know, but it

wasn't I thought I, you know. They speak so mechanically. The only one I liked in that was John Forsythe, you know. Now I'll tell you what did catch my mind. Have you ever seen, oh well perhaps you won't have it in Coventry, the advertisement for the Bella magazine?

Oh isn't that [the] "Whatever you want" thing?

With the child. Now do you get the one where the little boy's trying to put the book through the door and the letter box is stuffed up and he's got a crew cut. But it's
10 the expression on his, I don't know whether he's a little boy or whether he's a big one he, ah well you know I used to love that and I've wrote to Granada Studios and said what's happened to the little lad, the little boy. There's nothing very flowery about the letter, they'll have a good laugh if they read it. "What's happened to the little lad", I said, "out of the advertisement", I only posted it yesterday, "for Bella", I said, "not the one you've got on now, the one you used to have", I said, "because it used to make my day". He reminded me just of [my grandson] now
20 he's got his hair like that, you know, and I said, "I thought he was a smashing little lad and could I", you know, "could you give me his name just as a matter of knowing who he was", you know, but I haven't had an answer back yet, I haven't had time. But I thought now I like that you see, you know it I was [?] It's the way they caught him, nothing else in the advertisement, but he's made that advertisement and now they've got another one on, you know, so I don't know where he's gone. I suppose

they've shelved it for a little while but [...]

Do you write many letters?

No.

Cos you've mentioned like Granada and Margaret Thatcher and others.

Oh yes, that's how I get it off my chest. Oh, Margaret Thatcher, yes, and my M.P. at the House of Commons, just in the same language as I'm talking to you and when I'm speaking it's the same language only I get carried away.

10 No, everything's me, nothing put on. If they asked me to speak on television they'd get the same thing. I'd p'raps have to say one or two words, you know, I don't swear, that's one thing, but the reason I wouldn't ever try to go to those shows, I might get too excited, you know, but [?] Ann Lesley was on last night, I can't stand her, she gets right up my back, she was going on and on about child benefit, you know. She gets well paid for her job, she was saying, you know, she doesn't really need child benefit but she takes it. So one old fella in the audience said,
20 "You're talking about you don't want it but you collect it don't you", he says, "I'll collect it then." [L] [?] you know the way she does. But I like Robin Day. I get het up with them you know, and I join in. [L]

No, I don't write a lot of letters. Friends, I've friends, I sometimes write to the missionaries, you know abroad, wherever they are because they like a letter. I might not know them so I don't know what to say to them but it's me

as I'm speaking. It's me. Everything I do is me. There's nothing, I wouldn't know how to put anything over. I wouldn't know. You see, it's quite likely that if anybody was to say to me which just say for instance I did speak you know and they said, "Oh, you'd better not do that". I say, "Oh well do you want this interview or don't you", you know [?] I'm quite well aware, I won't say anything I shouldn't say but I'll say it my way, my way. They'll never like it, I suppose. [L] I might upset somebody's
10 applecart. I do in the Church when I'm giving a talk so they don't ask me very often. [L] [?] a spade's a spade. I do sometimes in all fairness write a speech out but I get up on the stand and it goes. I say what I want to say, you know. [L] I've got a talk in three weeks at school, at college I should say, on any -

Is this the English course?

Yes, and I have chose the subject of why they took the Bobby off the beat and I thought it would make, made a lot of difference. I've wrote the draft for it, took it to him
20 and he said, "I think I'll invite James Anderton here that night just to hear this", you know. [L] I like James Anderton every inch of the way. "Well", I said, "you can suit yourself Mr. Salmon", you know, "you can if you like, I'll be just the same just the same to him". Actually I've met him several times at the Manchester Show, you know, when we've been collecting for the Spastics. And now that has helped me enormously. I've a rapport with the public when I'm collecting [?] it might [?] a transfer, you know,

"You look as if you're in total darkness, come to look at me", you know. But they come back, they come back for shame's sake. But my boss, cos Steve, that is one of things at the Social when we were in Middleton and because of him and another lady and myself, that's his wife Anne there [showing photograph] another lady and myself, the first 25,000 pounds we made together. We had a great deal of fun. That has brought me a lot you know. And I go, "Come on", you know, "help Booth Hall Children's Hospital, 10 [?] Hospital." Then you get some [?] coming up you know, "You shouldn't have to do it". "I know we shouldn't have to do it, can you gives us an alternative?", you know and fun, we have some right fun. But I have gained a rapport with the public. Same with the Spastics, you know, if they ask me what is the Spastics, really Celebral Palsy you know, I can explain. I've worked in the office there, I've worked with the people, I'm on the committee and I give my views there just the same as I'm giving to you. It's always me.

20 *What about reading and writing, who do you talk about that with?*

Who do I talk about that with?

Yeah.

Well at the moment my writing's about me.

But I mean if you're discussing what you're writing or what you're reading at the moment, who do you talk to?

Well, there's not many people apart from the group I can talk to. I, in Church, I mean to say you see, the Mormons

are a very funny people. Some of them follow the Gospel, which is rightly so, blindly, but they're oblivious to everything else. Now the thought of me writing something, they just can't realise that it's true. And yet a lot of our people in America do this. In Administration, there's one or two of our big men are in the Reagan Administration. Our women through the Church, they work it differently in America to what they do here.

10 So I have not much chance, much to talk about to other people, to some of the people in the flats. We have a little get together, you know, and I talk to some of them and they've said, "Oh, let me read your work", [?] you know, and I take some of my work down and she thinks it's smashing, you know. She said, "To be able to turn around" [.] and I was talking to another lady, she says, "You know, I've always wanted to do that". I says, "Well, why don't you have a bash at it". I'm quick to give encouragement to other people. So she says, "Will you let me see some of those pages that you're writing?" I said, "I will
20 some, but not others". And I said, "Well, when I get so far I'll bring it up and let you have a look at it". So, no I don't get the chance to speak to many people. There's nobody all that interested you know. Unless you'd like to invite somebody down from television or telly for a spell.
[L]

No, no I don't get the chance to talk. But they find me not very interesting because I talk just the same as I'm

talking now. There's nothing if I was asked to do anything, I mean to say unless I had to read something out it's just the same. What I've got to say comes to me as I'm saying it, you know. It's not all primed out, not all cut and dried. That's why people like me, we never, never get a chance to even air a view on television. You see they want people that are [...] oh I don't know I've heard some people that talk like me, you know. But I'm not interested in anything like that. If it was to do for a
10 good cause, oh yes I'd be there like a shot. I'd say what I got to say and I wouldn't care who I offended, you know. And that's where I think I'd let myself down. I'd perhaps have to draw my horns in a little bit cos once I get going on anything that's very close to me, oh dear oh me, you've never heard anything yet you know. I'll go and I'll get my point through and I'll say, you know, like I do at the pensioners meetings. They go on about this, that and the other and I said, "Well, it's no good one or two of us or half a dozen", I said, "it's got to be you stand together,
20 divided you fall, together you stand. Yes", I said, "Oh don't give me this you can't do anything about it", I said. "How the hell do you know until you try it", you know. You know that that is it. But this is something that may have developed in the later years. I should have developed this many years ago and who knows what might have happened, you know, if I'd had the chance, but I never got the chance. But now you see I fill my life with these kind of things, but the charity work comes first, my writing when I can get, you know, to it to carry on with

it.

How long have you been going to writers' groups, the different workshops?

Oh, it's just over twelve month now. October I started and that was first, no, not at Commonword, I didn't know anything about Commonword, first at Oldham Wordsmiths, yes.

How did you find out about them?

I was at Alexandra Park in Oldham. We were campaigning for
10 Booth Hall and the women were going round, they were trying to form the group then, and they came to our stall and said were any of the girls interested in writing and young Cathy said, "No I'm not and my friend isn't, but", she said, "Kate, that elderly woman there," she said, "she is, she does write". That's how it started. But it was too far in the winter. It was hell last winter, you know. But when I knew, I went to Commonword once, and when I knew they were holding a group Tuesday morning I thought, ooh, that's fine. I still went out to Shaw because they hadn't
20 opened the Wednesday night one then. Then when I knew they were opening Wednesday night I thought, well, that's better for me, so I just wrote and said, I didn't leave them hanging in mid air. I wrote and said, you know, that that was why I'd left. I went to the book launch, you know, in August, this little book that they did and it was a very enjoyable evening cos there's one or two people there that had things published and [.] It was, there was

no friction, nothing like that just the distance.

But no, I don't get the chance to talk to a lot of people. Some of them don't understand what you mean by writing, you see. There must be many, many people that have got equally a story to tell as I have but they'll never get it down. See I've made my mind up I will now and I think the bits and pieces of writing that I've been doing have been leading up to this, to you know. So that's about all I can tell you about, nobody knows very much about me and if
10 ever you do hear me it'll be me. You'll say, "I know that person, that's Kate", you know. I hope I haven't bored you with all this.

No, you haven't at all, not at all.

Oh I hope I haven't bored you because something I am very aware of if I am talking to anybody and I'm going on, which stems from being alone. You find a lot of people do this, you know, they're there, you know, very obediently listening, I usually say, "Look, am I boring you? Am I taking your time up? If I am I'll understand", because I
20 know it can be, you can bore people, you know, I mean you can bore people. But by the same toss of the coin you can listen to somebody on television droning on and oh you think to yourself, will you switch the thing off. I can't listen to any more of that. There used to be programmes for universities on and one was a Professor [?] and it was engineering. And I don't know the first thing about engineering, but to listen to him was marvellous, his

students have got a gem. Because as he was talking he was explaining and he had the ideal knack of explaining, you know. I don't mind listening though, I'll listen to a scientist, you know, I'll listen to a scientist now and sometimes I'll grasp what he's doing but I haven't got a scientific mind. But yet I'm interested in science but mine's mostly the other worlds, you know, cos I firmly believe ours isn't the only planet. We have [...] there were other worlds that were made before ours was so henceforth
10 there will be other intelligences, which in due course the human race will know about. Mine's more that line.

I said I'm interested in news, world affairs. I try to keep my mind fresh, as fresh as possible, so I can keep people [...] I like dealing with the public. I'll talk to anybody, within reason you know, and I like to give encouragement to people. Above all I do love to see people get on. I love to see a good hardworking lad or girl there get ahead, you know, three cheers for them if they do and I don't begrudge anybody anything. I mean to say I might
20 like something, I haven't got very much, I might like something and think oh it's lovely that, I'd love to have that, that's [...] There's nothing else I can say about myself really.

Notes

1) At this point Kate used the local dialect of the time, "friendly with the bottle" and "kettled" to convey the nurse's drunkenness. She was then concerned that I would not understand these terms, but when I indicated that I did, she used dialect again, "you'll get my language", meaning that I would understand her.

2) Richard Haworth was the owner of one of the large mills in Salford, known locally as Dickie Haworth's, where Kate started work at the age of fourteen.

3) What Kate actually means here is that they will not be discovered. The word "unhidden" seems to be a combination of undiscovered and remain hidden, but in fact reverses the meaning.

4) In the original transcript I made from the tape this word was not clear. When I asked Kate about it later the place she remembered going to was Haworth, so I have included this in brackets.

5) Kate told me later that some relatives of her mother were quite well off, in fact her mother was working as their servant until the time she died, and they could easily have afforded to support her, but chose not to.

6) Here Kate confuses the names of animal characters,

possibly Beatrix Potter's creations, with Holmes and Watson, who becomes Johnson.

7) Kate makes the common mistake of using the wrong author for Wuthering Heights. What is of most interest to her is a composite Bronte life story, particularly their childhood, and how this is used in their writing.

8) Kate passed her GCSE English in the summer of 1989.

Appendix 2: Interview 2: Marilyn

I Introduction

I interviewed Marilyn in the meeting room in Commonword because she felt she would be most comfortable with this arrangement. I did not know until the conversation we had prior to switching the tape recorder on that she was agoraphobic, which meant that she had put a great degree of effort into being there. I appreciated this, and she also felt pleased with her own achievement. We met at the beginning of December 1988 and the interview took an hour and a quarter to complete.

II Transcript

Right, now can you remember your parents doing much reading when you were a kid?

Not at all, no.

So were there sort of reading materials around the house? Newspapers and possibly the odd magazine. No, so far as I'm aware neither of them were interested in reading.

And did they read to you when you were little, or tell you stories?

No. I can't elaborate on that because I know it's definite.
10 ite.

Right. So as a kid were you interested in reading?

Very much, very much, yeah.

Can you remember what you read?

I'll be honest, not really, but there is one book that does spring to mind to this day I remember it vividly that was Enid Blyton's The Land of the Faraway Tree. That's one that does stay in my mind - the rest I don't know, even though I mean as a youngster I was an avid reader and my sort of my speech and my spelling, my vocabulary were
20 very, very good for a young girl. I remember at one stage during primary school being joint top in, you know anything written or spelling, with one of the lads which was quite an achievement, you know. I hated being equal, I

wanted to be on the top but well I thought to myself, well he's a boy you know, and in them days boys were just better at everything anyway, you know. Maybe not today, but it was looked at then, you know.

What about fairy stories, did you have a favourite?

I liked them all. Favourite [P] I suppose Cinderella, I don't know, Little Red Riding Hood, lots of different ones. But I mean The Land of the Faraway Tree for me was, you know, similar to a fairy story and the best I've ever
10 read. It just stays imprinted on my mind. I'd probably enjoy it more today than any adult book I've read It's just one of those books that's stayed with me, you know.

Did your parents encourage your reading?

No. It was, that was just something for me, that I needed because I was very shy, very introvert, didn't have many friends. If anything I probably had one friend - I won't crack the joke that even she was imaginary [L] - but I just needed something to focus on and I think reading was it. It was my escape from a humdrum reality, or one of
20 feeling quite vague, you know it was something sort of real for me to relate to and I suppose if they did encourage me in any way it was more in the way of telling me that my speech was very good for my age and that I could not only converse with adults but was as good as adults, you know, and I knew that had come from reading, it hadn't come from anywhere else, and I think that spurred me on to keep reading. When I say keep reading, up

till my teens and after that I just completely lost interest.

Have you got any brothers and sisters?

One brother.

Is he older or younger?

Older, acts younger but he's older [L] He's older by a year.

Was he into reading and stuff or -

Up to a point. Not as much as me, but having said that his
10 English was very good and he had a very vivid imagination
so that, you know, some of the short stories that he wrote
I found really good. I enjoyed some of his short stories
but I, no I wouldn't say that reading was one of his
hobbies in any way. He was more, he's sporty, football and
whatever, you know.

What kind of schools did you go to?

Secondary, we both went to secondary school, which we both
liked. It was a good school. I thought going to secondary
school was, it was a very good thing for me because the
20 school I'd been to before when I was at primary school I
was [.] that shyness, it's kind of once you start off that
way you cannot change it and people just see you as the
one who keeps to herself or whatever, for whatever
reasons, you know. They might think you're snobby or
whatever but the point was for me it was shyness and I
couldn't change that. So for me to move to a new environ-
ment gave me a fresh start, a new chance to try and push

myself to sort of mix and relate with people and it brought me out of my shell a lot. Hence that when I made a lot more friends and had a lot more interests there wasn't as much need to escape into reading, you know, reality was better so in that respect school was very good for me.

Can you remember what subjects you liked and hated?

Well, I always liked English. Up to a point I liked Art, for the first few years I enjoyed French and Music and then my interest in both of them subjects waned. The ones
10 that I hated were Maths and P.E., those were my two pet hates, and then there were others that sort of just fell into the category of, well just non-interest really, Geography. Oh I really liked History. My interest for some reason waned in that but for my first few years I remember that was I would say p'raps my favourite subject. Home Economics was pretty much O.K. depending on my mood again, you know, if I would sort of knuckle down and be serious it was O.K. but sometimes I'd get a bit silly. I can't remember what else I studied to be honest. [L]

20 Can you remember what books you read?

That we were actually asked by the teachers to read? No, I really can't. I mean I just feel that it was completely left with us I mean actually [...] do you mean sort of in school time or at home?

Yeah, you know, like set books you'd have to, if you were doing English maybe they'd tell you to read a book and then they'd do lessons on it.

Nothing comes to mind. I think it was all sort of left to us. I mean actually in the classroom I remember we read some books on poetry. I don't know if it was Keats or somebody like that. "Marshmarigolds", that one poem stays in my mind and I don't know who it's by - it could be Keats, it could be somebody else. No, p'raps if I had more time to think about it something might come, but just off the cuff I can't think.

Right. Did you do much writing at school?

10 Well quite a lot. With English I mean we were regularly asked to write essays, sort of the meaning of a particular poem. I remember what my actual English exam talk was, that was about reincarnation, which I really believed in at the time. I've changed my views over the years, I don't believe in that at all now. And I remember finding that difficult and saying well you know I don't want to do this because I'm finding it hard to get enough information on the subject. And the teacher was sort of really interested in it. I don't know if it was from the point of view that

20 she'd just lost her husband or what. I got the impression very much as though she needed to believe that he was coming back or something, I really don't know, but also I suppose from the point of view that it was a subject that was very different and I suppose one that's sort of a bit mysterious or something. And she encouraged me to persevere with it and just in a way get myself moving off to other libraries - just because my library didn't have enough relevant information to get into town or, you know,

to a bigger library which I did and I was glad, you know, and when I actually - I mean I wrote that out I did the talk and I took it in that morning of the exam and I thought well, you know, it all looks, I've written it all out very good, that should come across quite well. And somebody said, "D'you know, I still can't memorise my talk", and I said, "What d'you mean?" and they said, "Well, you know, I can't memorise it all. I mean, I feel as though I need notes and pointers in there", and I said, 10 "You're joking", you know. I had no idea that we were supposed to memorise it and then just give this talk but without [.] I thought we were just meant to read it. I don't know why, I suppose that's the stupid side of my nature. But in those few minutes I condensed it all into my mind and I must have had a very good memory because it was pretty much word perfect. I had the odd note, which apparantly they allow you, and I suppose the fact that I was interested in the subject at the time did help a lot, and so it came across very well, and as I say that was the 20 kind of pressure because that was just all crammed into a few minutes.

Did your teachers encourage your writing then as well as the oral side?

Yeah, in ways like they'd compliment you on things that if say like they thought you had a good imagination or had any good ideas or if they thought, you know, "Come on, you're going to have to work harder cos I know you can do well in this subject", and so forth. In that respect,

yeah.

But what about your friends then at that stage, were they into reading and writing?

No, in the same way I wasn't. I mean it was just a case of you went to school, you had subjects you liked and didn't like and I suppose you felt obliged to knuckle down to some, you know, so you'd pick out the ones that you thought, "Oh well, I can cope with this, I can manage this", and in a way you were always glad when it was over
10 because there were better things to do once you got outside of school and the mere idea of picking up a book and homework and things, I mean O.K., you'd sort of do it when it was sort of, how can I put it, extra compulsory [L] where you knew that, depending on the teacher, if it wasn't done there was going to be trouble and that kind of a way.

How about magazines and that?

Actually it's funny you should say that. I do now, there was one girl who, not a close friend of mine, but a friend
20 nevertheless, at school, she used to [.] she was an avid reader, highly intelligent, very extensive vocabulary and, you know, people used to say to her, you know, "Where d'you get all this information?" and "how come you're so bloody clever?" you know, and things like that. And she said, "Well, I read a lot. It's the only way, the best way." She said, "I read at least 28 books a week". Yeah. In fact she'd say something like, "I just have a few hours

sleep a night". She literally read every waking minute and I admired her, I really did, but at the same time I felt I couldn't be like that. I mean I couldn't. To me that borders on the obsessive I think, you know. Having said that, if she enjoyed it that's completely up to her but I couldn't, I wanted to be like that but I couldn't. I wasn't prepared to put all that energy in and miss out on other things, important things like youth clubs and discos [L] but I don't know -

10 Did you read magazines though at school?

Yeah, the really young ones like Tammy and Jackie. It's hard to remember what other ones. I know I'll have read other ones, but I can't actually remember which other magazines were out then. Look Now and things like that. I actually read the Jackie magazine up until the age of about 20, 21 22, so I'm a bit late there. [L] You know, when I should have been stepping into the Woman or Woman's Own, I was still reading the Jackie. [L] Very hard transition there. [L] I only made it for appearances sake.

20 [L]

Well how about since you left school then, what about the reading you've done since then?

Again there wasn't much interest there. I suppose I felt, you know, that's all behind me now. That belongs with school, sort of in the past. And somebody gave me a book to read one day by James Herbert, The Rats, and although I found it made me feel a bit squeamish or whatever, I found

it compelling. I still had to read it, for all I found it a bit gory, and I really enjoyed it and I suppose at that point I meant to sort of take up reading again but never actually did. And that's [...] sort of any reading was left until three years ago when I came out of work and I just found it was, it had come into my life again and I needed it again.

So what kind of things did you start reading then?

Just novels, basically either novels from the library or
10 books that people gave me. I had, there was one favourite author, what was her name? Danielle Steel. I read quite a few of her books. I really enjoyed them. I liked, there was, I got a book from the library, it was a wartime romantic novel. It was just called Marqo. I can't remember the author's name but I really enjoyed that. What else? I also read one or two books on psychology and saying that I sort - they were actually the very light side of psychology if you like because there was one or two I picked up and I didn't understand them, I mean they were way beyond
20 me, and other more sort of, when I say serious I mean there was one book that I read and it was something to do with, what was it, it was about triumph over tragedy or surviving a great sorrow, and I felt that applied to me and the way I was feeling. And I suppose I wanted to read about somebody else who had triumphed over a tragedy and felt really bad in themselves that it might just help me come through it. Becasuse on the back of the book, apart from, you know, saying about what the story was about,

somebody who'd read it had said, a very good book for somebody at the lowest ebb of their life or going through a bad time, you know, sort of a good book to read. So, you know, my reading wavered between the very light fantasy sort of reading where it gets used for escapism and the down-to-earth lets deal with, you know, the really nitty-gritty side and see if that can help me in that way - one of which was The Courage to Grieve. I won't sort of go into the reasons why I read that book, except to say that
10 that was how I was feeling. There was nobody to describe the way I was feeling and I wasn't able to deal with it, and felt that through this book I would find the courage, you know. I read some really, you know, good novels, as I say basically fiction but very enjoyable and very much different to Mills and Boon, which was for me, I needed at times when my concentration was poor and I felt really low, in that they're so much easy reading. You pick them up and in a sense it doesn't matter how bad you feel, they're not too difficult to follow and it can really take
20 you away from sort of how you're feeling. So it again depends very much on my mood as to what I read, you know.

Where there any characters from the books that stick out in your mind?

Yeah, there's one in particular, what was the book called? The book was called Once More, Miranda, by Jennifer Wilde, and the leading man in that story, a man called Cam Gordon, he really sticks in my mind.

Why's that? What about him?

Although sort of the people described are sort of fictitious they can sometimes, or usually always, relate to somebody that you know, or well - but I mean I don't mean that it's always the case - sometimes, you know, you can sort of build up a picture of somebody and you know that it doesn't look like anybody you know, but in this particular instance he did. And he was a real rogue with a heart, you know, and I think that's what I liked about him. He was
10 sort of manly and didn't show his feelings but nonetheless they were there and you knew they were there. And what else? [P] It won't just come. I mean there's a lot of things about him that I liked. I think there was a part in him that p'raps I could relate to him, that he was I suppose not demonstrative. He didn't sort of shower his love on the leading character in the book but just, you knew it was there. He held his feelings back, in check, and somehow that appealed, I don't know why - I think I'm a masochist really. [L] So if it was sort of relating to
20 me in that sense, yeah.

Any women characters stuck in your mind?

[P] I suppose that, yeah, that the girl, the leading woman in that particular story, Miranda, in the earlier chapters of the book, she appeals to me. She was spirited and adventurous, independent. [P] What else was she? Wild and kind and brazen. She was a street urchin you know, to begin with, so she was kind of a bit of a mixture of things.

Right, what about television? Do you watch much telly?
Probably more than is good for me actually, yeah, I do.

What do you like?

Well, I like, I'll be honest, not a lot, but I dare say
I'm like a lot of people in that it's there and I some-
times think that that's where a lot of valuable time goes
when I should be doing better things. I sort of think, oh
switch the box on, it's company, it's like having someone
there and not [...] again it's this I suppose during these
10 last three years now I'm thinking prior to that I went out
a lot more, so I suppose television didn't focus as much
then as it does now and for me, you know, to sort of
switch the telly on is like having somebody in my home but
somebody I can walk away from. There's no pressure there,
it's just I can tune in or not. I like frivolous program-
mes Blind Date, Beadles About, what else, The Bill, Bread.

What about the soaps, are you into any of them?

Not really. I used to like Falcon Crest, I think that's
back on at the moment but I don't know I just, I can't be
20 bothered watching television during the day. I see it as a
night-time thing. No, I'm not a soap fan at all although
no, I tell a lie, I did used to like Dynasty [pronounced
with an I] or Dynasty [pronounced with an i] [L]. I
pronounce it Dynasty [I] (1) anyway, that's not on at the
moment, but I did follow that for a while. Coronation
Street is one of those things that if it's on but and it's
there I'll watch it, but I couldn't care less if I missed
20 episodes or whatever and then just, you know, so I

don't follow it. That's it really. As I say, I'm not really a lover of soaps. Sometimes I'll watch a documentary, if the actual subject appeals or if I think it's relevant in any way to me, you know, like say there was a documentary on tranquiliser addiction or anything like that. Top of the Pops, as I say just nice and frivolous things.

What about films, do you see many films?

I don't actually. For one reason I don't have a video so
10 I'm not in a position of being able to chose, oh I'd like to sort of see this particular film, and I find the films they put on telly really lacking, you know, sort of very poor and I'm not one for going to the pictures. But I mean there is a reason for that which I won't go into, it's a personal thing. It has to do with when I was married and that is a lot of why I don't like going to the pictures. And I also think p'raps even if I had the means of going and getting a video it might not appeal.

Right, well can you tell me a bit about how you came to
20 start writing?

Well, basically it was just a feeling of after having read so many books over a period of say almost a year and there being very little else in my life I needed something new, some kind of hobby that would make my life that little bit fuller, which was how it sort of - my thoughts then went in the direction of well, why don't I try and write a novel for Mills and Boon, which is short in comparison

with a lot of novels. Which when it actually comes down to it was much harder than I expected, you know, I'd sort of write half a dozen pages and thrust it on my family and say, "Read that and tell me what you think about it". But I felt, my brother was sort of picking it to pieces and finding fault with everything and he wasn't really, that was just the sensitive side of me, not ready for criticism of my first few pages and things like that. And this went on and on till I found that it did actually become more
10 flowing and I suppose became a bit more life like, it wasn't sort of stilted or whatever word you'd use to describe it and I had a lot of enthusiasm for it but I'd bitten off more than I could chew I suppose, you know, and so that was kind of put on a back burner and it was sort of back to reading again. And then a social worker who I was seeing at the time said to me, you know, did I think it would be a good idea for me to join a writers' group. And I said well I did but I didn't know where there was one, you know, and he actually found out about Commonword
20 and the address, gave it to me, you know, said, "Why not give it a try", and months went by and he said, "Well, did you ever get round to going, did you ever get in touch?" And I said, "Well no", you know, "I'm still not ready", and, "I can't", and things like that and it was roughly a year later when I actually [...] the subject came up again and I decided I'd give it a try and I'm very glad I did I must admit.

So what kind of writing do you do now then?

[.....] Well, I have actually only been here, say five, six times at the most and for those first couple of times I mean I didn't write anything at all. Basically because it had taken enough out of me just to get here as I've said with having agoraphobia, I felt you know, my achievement was already done just in getting here. And because the atmosphere is so relaxed and informal it makes it easier to sort of have a go at writing something. And again you know, there's no pressure, there's nobody saying, "Well",
10 you know, "You've been so many times or whatever and you haven't written anything and I think that enables you to think, "Well, yeah, I'll have a go", and so I think it was on the third visit, on the third group that I'd - the subject was "What is in a name?" and so I wrote a short story for that, which is quite something in itself because I remember when I was younger and when I was at school I had a habit of when I wrote anything I rambled on and on. It was just - at least I think I did, the only thing I know is that the essays I did were always much longer than
20 those required, you know. They'd say, well, you know, hand in an essay of say three or five pages, mine would be eleven, you know, and even after a lot of criticism I could not change that, it was always the same. One teacher in particular used to just throw it down and say, "Well that's it, I'm not going to read it. I asked for two or three pages, you give me seven, I ask for five, you give me eleven", and he just would not read it. But try as I might, I couldn't shorten it, you know. That was just the way it was. How dare he ask me to alter my story. [L] And

so being very much aware of that and I suppose being sensitive to that I thought ,well, you know, I've got to condense whatever, I've got to make sure it's not on two pages or whatever and to my surprise it was and I couldn't believe that. I thought p'raps I've learnt to cut out all the drivel, you know, cut the wheat from the chaff or whatever, and I was very surprised. And the following week the subject was "Stress and Anxiety" and I thought, well, my God, you know, I could write a book on that and I
10 thought, well there'll be no problem because I've had so much experience of it. But you know, when it actually came down to it I think when you've sort of been through an experience like that you don't want to write about it and it is actually painful and you don't want to touch on it, you don't want to, you don't actually want to dwell on it. And so whereas I thought it would be no problem to write about it, I can't actually say I enjoyed it. But again I made that story into just a two page short story, and just about one particular episode relating to stress, because
20 other than that it would have been a book, I mean if I was to include sort of a lot of the things that have happened in my life. So again, you know I'd actually written about something that I found difficult from the point of view that it was very real to me. I think I came the week after that and I've missed several groups since, so you see I have actually been a few times. But it's, I mean the subjects are all sort of very topical and the fact that there's so many different subjects, you know, you're bound to come across subjects that sort of you think, well no I

mean that just doesn't appeal, I can't write about that. And to me that was a good thing. I mean I think the first or second time I came it was an open session, which left the choice completely wide open, and I thought well what can I write about, it's too much. Now of course that wouldn't happen for everybody, but for my personality I was just thinking, oh God no, you know. [L] So the following week, given something, given a subject, you look at it and say yes or no, you know, and I thought, mm, 10 yeah, possibly. I'll give that a try, and fortunately, I mean it worked out. But I dare say there'd be a lot of subjects that I'd take a look at and think, well no, you know I either don't quite know enough about that particular thing, or no it just doesn't appeal, in which case there's nothing, you know, there's just no enthusiasm there and it's just, I don't know. I really enjoyed hearing people read out their work, you know, it hasn't been published but one day it might and you'll have heard it first, you know. And I mean some of it is very, very 20 good. I'm very impressed by some of the poetry I've actually heard here, and prior to that I'm not really a lover of poetry so I think that says something good for them, you know.

Have you ever tried writing any poems?

Well, actually I've tried, but it's something I would really like to be good at and be able to do. No I've tried sort of writing the rhyming type of poetry and it comes across as, how can I put it, juvenile to me, sort of

nursery rhyme-ish and I thought, well if I could just sort of write a serious kind of poem that doesn't rhyme but when I do that I think, no, that doesn't sound right. P'raps if somebody else had written the same thing I'd think, oh that's good, but I'm very critical of it, and so in a way I feel that I can't win cos if it rhymes it's juvenile and doesn't sound right, and if it doesn't rhyme well it's not a poem and it doesn't sound right, d'you know what I mean? But when I hear other people read their
10 poetry out and it doesn't rhyme and it's sort of a serious kind of poem and that I think it's great, fine.

When did you do that then, when did you have a go at poems?

The first time I had a go was about two years ago and basically that was writing down about what I was going through and how it made me feel, and I felt so bloody ooh depressed and low that I was actually sorry in a way that I'd attempted it, because [...] perhaps had I come through that stage and been looking back at it and thinking, oh
20 God, you know, I remember that phase in my life and how it was the lowest point in my life, it might have been different but because I was still actually there in that position it was just too much. I was sorry I ever attempted it. And I tried again a few months ago to re-write it from the point of view of improving it, and again I still felt really low when I read it and just thought, no I'm still, I can't do it yet. I would actually have to come through this and perhaps leave it again say for six

months or so and feel on top again, or feel good in myself, to be able to attempt that. And that is basically the only attempt I've had bar one other time I wrote a poem about loneliness that's basically it.

Why do you think you chose poems for those subjects?

I suppose because although I mean I would never have attempted to write a story about what I had gone through and how that made me feel, that would have been like suicide to me, I couldn't take that, and so I suppose in
10 my mind I probably thought that a poem would have been condensing a lot of it, and saying more about how I felt rather than what happened to me, and probably felt that I could deal with that and could cope with that, but found I couldn't. Maybe I suppose in one sense like when I wrote the one about loneliness I was actually quite glad I'd written it even though at the time of writing it it made me feel quite low in myself because it was going back to only a short while before and the feelings were very strong but in fact after it was finished I felt better. It
20 was as though I had flushed something away, something out of me and I felt better but at the time, that came afterwards so maybe it's just a way of ridding my system of things that hurt. I don't know, maybe it's a way of trying to look deeper at how or why you feel how you do.

What kind of writing do you say you enjoy best?

[P] Fiction - something I mean I very much think that applies to where I'm at now, you know, the stage I'm at-

but if you can write something that is fictional and p'raps enjoy it then it actually takes a lot less out of me than if I write about something pertinent to me.

Is that the direction you see your writing going in the future?

No. Well yes and no I suppose, because I suppose my goals are to, if I can, break into writing romantic novels [?] [L] and eventually one of the things I really would like to do, and I don't envisage that happening for quite a few
10 years, is to write a historical romantic novel, because I really do enjoy them. But I think obviously there's a lot more work involved from the research point of view and just in the whole thing. And I dare say I might touch upon things that have happened to me which would, you know, very much be bringing the serious side into writing. But that again is all a maybe, but it's there in the back of my mind that that would make for better reading than something, you know, sort of light and easy. Again, you know, it depends on everybody's mood cos I, many a time
20 sit down and read a Mills and Boon novel and enjoy it quite a lot.

Do you think you get the same kind of enjoyment out of writing it as reading it?

No, no definitely not, because from the reading point of view I see it as escapism. I suppose from a writing point of view people could say, well isn't using your imagination some form of escapism, and to a point I suppose it

has to be, but you're always aware of it's got to be, you know, it's got to be right. If you're talking about a particular country, their cultures and so forth, things like that have to be right, so it's from a different point of view. And I think there's a lot more concentration involved in writing anything than there is with actually reading it. Some people may disagree, maybe it says a lot about my reading, maybe I shouldn't have said that. [L] That's just how I feel. [L]

10 Have you ever sort of modelled your writing on somebody else?

[P] I can't say that I have, but if I hadn't maybe it's because at this stage I am still so new to writing. I think when you are new to writing it's raw, it's you, and it's just [...] you know p'raps a few years later you could look back and say, my God, that's dreadful, did I really write that, you know. But I mean I suppose there is something a little bit special about your first attempts, you know, sort of I suppose if you went back and looked at
20 your primary school essays and thought, aw, isn't that nice", you know, [L] in that kind of a way. Obviously you sort of you hope to go on and improve, but I think it's too early for me to say if I model myself on anybody with only having written these few things, you know, like two short stories, two poems and a chapter for a hopefully to be, not soon to be, but [L] a novel in the future.

Do you have people around then that you can talk about

reading and writing with?

Well yeah, one friend of mine who also writes. Now neither of us have ever actually read the other's work. I've never read anything she's written, but I think that the interest sort of started roughly about the same time for both of us. And she got a creative writing course that she sent away for and gave me copies of, which I thought was very nice because it's quite expensive to get something like that and she you know, gave me several copies of that. So
10 that was very good, that was very helpful. And of course relatives or some of the friends I've spoken to say, oh I'd love to write a novel, and I find that quite funny because to me that comes across as if I'd already written one, and all I've said is I would love to write one and sort of had a go like. I just sort of give to them what other people have give to me and that is encouragement in [.] why not have a go, I mean what have you got to lose, nothing. I mean you could say, oh well there's all the time involved if nothing ever comes of it, but I mean you
20 could sit and watch the telly for 20, 30 hours a week and what comes of that? And you know, some of them will say, "Well I've got a good imagination but my grammar isn't right." Or, you know, "I need to know more about English". And I say, "Well it's a bit hard but get yourself to nightschool, do the English". So it's generally that I always think it's nice you know, when sort of people encourage each other. Cos sometimes I think if you lack confidence or you've not got much self-belief your feet will never get off the ground you know, you'll just think

well no, and you'll keep putting it off and so I was actually very glad to have people encourage me you know.

Who do you show your writing to then?

Well when I very first began I'd sort of show it to just sort of close relatives really, but after a while even that stopped. I began to feel differently about things, seeing it as my pet project, and sort of wanted it to be secret. Then you know suddenly it was [...] they probably thought, "Oh we're not good enough for you now", you know
10 [L] "She's already changed", you know "It's alright to read the first" [...] but what it basically was sometimes I think you know, if you confide in one person too much they suddenly feel a responsibility for your story and, "Well let's change this", and "That's not right", and "Let's chop this out", and by the time you've done all that you've dissected it so much you start to feel no, this isn't right, you know, I'm not happy with this until you end up and you're not happy with any of it. So I felt well let's change this, you know I'll sort of carry on, write a
20 bit more and sort of then let them read it rather than having it dissected every few pages you know, get more written and p'raps then say well you know, what d'you think of that, can you give me any advice or d'you think I should change any of it or whatever. It is always nice to have somebody read what you've written and give constructive criticism. I don't agree with tearing anything to pieces. And in a way I think it can help sometimes if it's somebody you don't know very well therefore they're not

biased, you know, they're not going to say good if it's not. And it can also go the other way, you know, where it's again if it's somebody you know maybe I think they're more tempted or more inclined I should say to put you down than build you up. It can go that way. So I think it's better, and that's why although I was nervous the first time in reading something out I was actually quite glad that I didn't know people too well, I think that helped. But inside I was worried that they were sort of going to
10 say, "God that was terrible", you know, but I think that goes through everybody's mind.

Did you deliberately choose a women's writer's workshop or was it just the time that was convenient?

The time was very much convenient because it was the daytime one. You see there was others that were at night and I'm more afraid to go out at night than during the day. I mean having agoraphobia I think as I say I'm very lucky, I'm doing well to just be getting out at all so that was a factor. And I think also, yeah I think the fact
20 that it was, or is should I say, an all-women's group did appeal to me, from the point of view that I was thinking well, you know if my interests lie in writing a romantic novel, especially in the Mills and Boon category, men are gonna laugh at that. That is how I see it and, you know, instead of thinking, well so what, I just thought well no, I'm too vulnerable. I don't, I'm not having anybody laughing you know and I suppose that's where I thought an all women's group would be best. I mean I dare say there's

a lot of women that would laugh and think you know, trivia, because you know, I can appreciate that there would be an awful lot of people could not relate to Mills and Boon and literature of that sort of calibre, you know. I mean I can respect that, but with men it's just this [.] it would be a different thing, you know. So yeah it does [.] very much an element of wanting it be an all women's group.

Why do you reckon romance then, fictional romance is so
10 important?

Because real life's so bloody awful, you know. [L] You never get it right and so again it harks back to that escapism, you know sort of, how can I put it, living things out in a different way, sort of saying well you know, it isn't right in real life, I can't get it right, but I can read about it and imagine how it could be. [L] Not how it could be [P] I suppose just as an escapism to how I wish it could be. I think that's what's behind it.

There's a way in which you can get it right for your
20 characters as well if you're actually writing.

Well that's it because you're shaping everything. And you know I have a strong feeling that, probably not in every case but a lot of characters are built up from like a multitude, or different facets from different people's personality, and they've put them into one. Hence how he become so perfect, you know, he's not sort of the gentle man and boring, he's a rogue and he's dashing, and he's

this and he's that, and he's loyal and he's got a heart with it and all that kind of thing. [P] Then again like romance is so popular, so you're looking into a stream whereby you know, there's always a call for it, it's popular. Probably very competitive, but there again you know, if it's very popular it balances out.

Have you ever thought of writing short stories for magazines and [...]

Well that had never occurred to me actually. It was only a
10 couple of weeks ago that the friend I mentioned before suggested it to me. More from the point of view she said you know, try reading a few and just get the gist of them you know. Cos I think that was shortly before I came here maybe [?] I just ramble on and how can I write anything short and so I did read the odd one or two in magazines.

Can you remember which ones? Which magazines? I won't say which stories but -

It was either, let me see, there's a magazine called Best and there's Bella and Woman's Own and Woman just those few
20 magazines. I buy absolutely loads of magazines and I'll tell you the truth, I never read them. I flick through them and I mean I've got Woman, Woman's World, 19, you know, different magazines like that and I just flick through them, look at the adverts. So I mean there could actually be short stories in there and I've never got round to reading them. And I think as with anything, you know, if I was actually thinking of writing a short story

for a magazine then I would concentrate a lot more on reading several you know because I think obviously you know, reading helps very much if that's the goal you're heading for, obviously the more reading you do the better your writings gonna be. If it's gonna be good at all, [L] that's what I meant to say.

Notes

1) What Marilyn is refering to here is the debate about the pronunciation of the word "Dynasty" which followed the screening of the American soap on British TV.

Appendix 3: Interview 3: Doreen

I Introduction

I interviewed Doreen in her own home at the end of December 1988. The interview took approximately an hour and three-quarters to complete. Doreen's language is rhythmical and could be described as Irish-English. Her major concern in the conversation, as well as in her writing, is with a kind of precision, and words like searching, exactness, preciseness, honesty occur repeatedly.

II Transcript

Right then, to go back to when you were a child - do you remember your parents doing much reading?

I think hardly at all. [?], I don't remember the reading- I remember one of the things I used to like reading because I didn't do much either as a child was a mag or magazine, women's magazines - one was called the Red Letter - penny dreadfuls or tuppenny dreadfuls or something like that they used to be called, and there'd be a serial in them and I used to like reading them. I think
10 maybe I'd've read more if there was more material available but they weren't appropriate, or they weren't considered appropriate for children. I think I was about ten, reading about steamy passion and stuff like that. So presumably my mother would have read those but I don't think she bought them. I think they were the kind of magazines or books that were, I can't remember the names- they're not a magazine, they're not a book right, but they were for women, aimed at the women's market and they would've been passed from one neighbour to another. I can
20 remember my father didn't approve of them. I can't quite remember what he said, but I think he used to say penny dreadfuls or something like that and call them devil's sort of books or that kind of thing. Those aren't his exact words but he disapproved of that. I wish I could remember him. He was - I just can't remember him reading at all and I can't remember seeing her, but presumably they would've [?]. I don't know when they would've read.

Maybe they didn't read all that much anyway. We didn't have many books in the house, but we had an old history I remember cos I used to do my homework from it. But it was that sort of seventeenth century, well it was, you know when you get the fs - I feel a bit stilted because of that thing there but I'll try to ignore it (1) - you know when you get the s or the letter fs that look like s, so you get ruffian instead of russian right? And that was in the house and I think it was you know, it must've been quite
10 an old book. And one or two a neighbour used to lend me, again in some respects books that would've been unsuitable for young girls, to do with love and disappointment and that kind of thing. This is when I was about 12. They were alright, I mean there was nothing sort of wrong with them, but certain people would've dis [jump in tape] [....] So right, your question is did they read much is that it? I'd say no probably not.

Can you remember any other books around the house other than the one you read - the schoolbook?

20 This is dreadful. I would've had schoolbooks right. There was a book and it was to do with Catholicism and to do with, I think it was aimed at young men - my father was a, I found it out later, had been converted to Catholicism, so it was a kind of a guide, a guidance for him. I remember reading it when I was about 16 or 17 - this is a few years after he died - and that I think had been in the house for some years. This old history book that I refered to, and then the women's sort of, Red Letter is the one

name that I can remember, and I can't - I think we had a dictionary in the, yes we would've had a dictionary in the house [.] and I had to sort of think hard. I just can't remember [.] oh hold on, I had an older sister about six years older than me and she had, I can't remember if it was Dubliners, no it was Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man that somebody had lent to her and I remember coming across that, by which time I would've been a teenager right, and that's about it I think. But that book will
10 have come in, well all books come in from outside don't they, that book by Joyce was not of our house, it was somebody else brought it in. Before you came I was thinking of books I had read right. We had a local library but we were often chased out, but we weren't allowed to use it right. [L] But I borrowed books from there and the kind of books I remember were - I remember the Arabian Nights, the expurgated version, and then books, sort of detective kind of books but for children, aimed at children. One was called Scratches on the Glass. But I can
20 remember trying to count up, I can think of about, less than ten books I read before the age of 14 and they would've been mostly through the library. A book that I think is important, but it wouldn't come under literature, but I think it's important, that's the Catechism right. The parables I'd've read at school. All this in Irish by the way, right. I used to get read the sort of myths, if we were good in school we'd get the legends, myths, Irish legends and that read to us, again in Irish. And then we had things like readers, you know you learn how to read,

and incidentally I learnt to read in Irish before I learnt to in English.

So English is like a second language is it?

English, yeah in school, English was not spoken except in English lessons. I went to an all Irish school, that is Irish speaking, so you learnt your subjects through the medium of Irish, which I probably spoke quite well and understood quite well. But there's a qualification here, children were meant to be seen and not heard, so I didn't
10 get much chance to be expressive, put it that way.

What did you speak at home?

English. Nobody spoke Irish outside of the school, nobody that I knew. My sisters spoke a little but they didn't like it. We didn't go to the same school anyway. I was teaching my father Irish. He was really pleased that I could speak it and then he got ill and died and so on, so that didn't get very far.

But let me [...] I'm trying to think of books [...] oh there's a book that was again, censorship was quite heavy in
20 Ireland in this is the sort of 40s, I left school in '48, but the kind of book that was acceptable, that was sort of recommended reading in English for young girls, were books by a writer called Annie M. P. Smithson. I was thinking about one of them last night and that they were horrible, they weren't at all enjoyable and its really odd how even if you don't like them, I was reading them as a kind of

duty, this is what I should read, and they were like intended to shape your mind as to how a proper woman behaves and you're meant to be sort of quite passive, extreme passivity that kind of thing and [...] I'll tell you all of them but maybe we could leave that till later on. [L]

I'm trying to think there were also short stories by people called, I think it was Padraig O'Connor I think would've been one of the writers, there was a little
10 character, the lad called [?] I remember used to get, just a youngster, used to get up to sort of mischief and stuff like that but I [...] see we didn't - the school I went to right, I was a bit of an oddity in that school, because it was mostly the children I would say of teachers, the professionals in and around Dublin, that would've gone there. It was considered a very good school, right. It was good for me in some respects, there were things going on there that I could pick up as I went along, like the language that was better taught there than any other place
20 probably in, maybe in Ireland even. There were subjects that you could take, but I didn't take, like music, Latin, but I didn't take cos you needed extra, you had to pay for those. I didn't have all the books, right, that you needed to have. I didn't have the sort of social backup to stay in that school really, I just stayed there because I was enrolled there.

I'm beginning to lose track [L] of where we're going now

with these questions. I'm trying to sort of limit it to, I'm trying to give a flavour of what it was like - for instance I remember I hated History at school, I couldn't understand History, and I remember I used to miss a lot of school as well, partly through my own illness and family sort of upset and things like that. So one time I remember going back to school and being asked, the essay was "What is the Importance of History?" right - I still can't answer that question [L] - but I remember writing down
10 something that was slated. The teacher said it was a dreadful essay, she'd never come across anything so bad in her life. And then one of my school friends, well school mates, class mates saying something, talking about the Crusades now, like religious history, and I hadn't even considered that, I didn't know about it right, despite all the sort of religious teaching that we had, I didn't know about the Crusades. And its only sort of in retrospect that I realise that that young Miss right, would've had older brothers and sisters, maybe going on to university,
20 maybe at secondary school, and books in the house where she could have had that kind of information, and I didn't have that sort of backup to find out about things like that. And I didn't know how to have access to it either, where to sort of get hold of it. But anyway I was, I felt a bit alienated at school to say the least.

Can you remember your parents either reading or telling you stories when you were little?

My mother never right, from which I gather that its not

just my memories fault here, I don't think she did tell me stories. My dad, this was really, my dad was in his 60s when I was born and I was 12 when he died and that's like one of the things I sort of I miss it, in one sense right, that he would have been wonderful - you know how children are encouraged to talk to their grandparents to find out about history and stuff like that - my dad would have lived in Dublin at really interesting times you know, sort of it'll be, he was born in 1871, and things like Home
10 Rule and the 1916 Rising, all that kind. I never knew anything about that, but he did tell me, he used to tell me fairly blood curdling kind of things, [L] really insensitive things about, he was describing the rack to me one time, you know the rack that you get stretched, in sort of gory detail. I mean I was sort of, I knew I couldn't come to any harm cos he was sort of very kind, and it was safe to be hearing all this stuff, like nobody was going to grab hold of me and put me on the rack. But for some reason that sort of sticks in my mind, cos it was
20 so horrible. And I don't know why he was telling me all this, telling me about something that I now realise was to do, Dublin was a garrison town, now I didn't know that, it wasn't a garrison town in my time, but what he was describing about the soldiers I realise that it was, I dunno what period, but that there were soldiers, British soldiers in and around Dublin, and things to do with how you could be sort of, like people would know which side you were on and stuff like that, by certain things you did and said sort of. I think, I dunno quite what the point of

all this was, but I think if there was any kind of an exchange between us that maybe I might have been telling him, I can't remember now clearly, I might have been telling him stories that I knew about because of this language thing, and we were exchanging information and so he was telling me his. I'm sure he'd better ones than that [L] but I just don't understand why he was choosing to tell me those. Like maybe, this isn't in the form of a story, but like one of the things, he would sort of hint
10 at things [...] it's sad that even if I was 12 when he finally died, he was in hospital quite a bit as well so I hadn't access to him, because I remember going to see him once in hospital, I think children wouldn't have been allowed or something to go and visit. And like one of the things he was influential about was again this religious thing that I [...] we had this Lent you know, that before Easter [...] d'you know about Catholicism I don't want to be
-

I was brought up Catholic.

20 I'd be telling you things that you already - right [L] you abstain from meat on Friday right, and you cut down, you give up something for Lent, and I remember sort of coming home from school and sort of saying to him about like what I was going to give up for Lent and stuff. All I could think to give up was soup, and like that was what we had, the soup right [L] and he was saying look you don't, people like you don't have to give up things. And he showed me a different side of Catholicism I hadn't come up

against, and it was this thing that alright if rich people got luxuries, let them give them up, but poor people didn't give anything up because his expresion was, "All the year round it's Lent for you", right and that's sort of stuck in me how [.] there was other things to do with- we were very poor so, I think you might've picked up that, he said there were other things in life other than money getting, that kind of an attitude. Now at the time I was really angry about it because I, not that I wanted a lot
10 of money or anything, but I was just so sick to the back teeth about being poor, I didn't like it, I couldn't get the message of it, the meaning of it and I couldn't understand why anybody would opt for that, right. I still think it's a bit of an oddity to opt for but maybe given the alternative extremes of riches, since one depends on the other, maybe in the end somebody like him would've opted, if there was a choice, I don't know. And there was some other points that he, the sort of influences, and they wouldn't come into the terms of storytelling, but
20 they're kinds of like the messages without, you know when you tell a child a story there's a sort of moral to it and stuff like that, he would give me the moral without the story. [L] So that's it then. I didn't have many stories from them.

How about fairy stories? I mean did you know many or was it more of the Irish -

I think I'd've heard those in school. My mother was not from Dublin, she was from a place in the midlands called

Carlow, and I remember going down to the country - we call it the country right, as opposed to the city - and I've some feeling of having stories there, round a big you know fireplace, a great big fireplace as big as that (2) [?] and you could sort of sit into it, and people telling stories there and singing songs and that kind of thing, in this big sort of stone-flagged kitchen, that sort of an atmosphere. But I had [.] that would've been say for a fortnight every year, or something like that. I can't
10 think of any now, that's the kind of place that you'd've had stories, but I can't think of any examples of them. Maybe if after you go I'll sort of, if I can think back, I'll jot some down if I can think of anything that was said. What I can remember was songs sung, and they're stories in themselves I suppose, again in English, and sort of dancing and things like that. But I just can't remember sort of stories, no.

But did you do much writing as a child or was it just school stuff?

20 I did school stuff, but something that I forgot until fairly recently was that as soon as I could write - as soon as I learnt to read then I learnt to write - I actually started to, I remember writing a poem. I can't remember the content. I would've been about eight. I didn't learn to read till I was about six or seven, seven I think. And this poem was in English and I did a drawing with it as well, and the reason I remember it was that one of the girls in school showed it to the teacher and,

"Isn't this good", this kind of thing, and it was something to do with the sky I remember. And I remember my sister, my older sister, being very, saying to me, "Did you write that?" This isn't the poem, this is sort of a story that I wrote round about 12. This you know, one, she was really sort of in praise of it, and she was never in praise - you know sisters don't always get on, and she was usually quite critical of me, I never did anything right- and when she said, "Did you write this, did you do this?",
10 I remember trying to think, should I deny it and trying to get out of it, cos I thought there was going to be some trouble about it, or embarrassment about it. And then she seemed really pleased, "It's wonderful", or something like that. And it was a fantastical kind of a story, it was about sort of supernatural powers or something like that some child had. And again I had a drawing with that, because I used to draw a lot. I drew from the time I was quite young, usually people, sort of faces and so on, and I seemed to do that a lot more readily and easily than I
20 could write. But I did write a bit, other sort of, I suppose a poem and this sort of never-never land or something like that but -

Did your parents encourage you, doing that or discourage you or were they neutral?

They, I think now, there's no think about it, my mother was quite disapproving of me as a person. I think I was too, if I say outspoken, it was that I didn't have the, is guile the right word, or I didn't have the sophistication

to shurrup right, so I'd blurt things out. [L] And I was always being packed off for letting out family secrets and stuff, and I'd no sort of skin, d'you know what I mean? [L] I'd no [...] and I was, I think she felt I was doing it on purpose, she didn't realise that I was just an idiot really. [L] My dad was if anything encouraging, but I think he didn't [...] oh that's right, when I used to go on holiday to the country - I think I used to be packed off there as well, out of the way [L] - I remember he used to
10 write to me. He'd write letters even, like again just as I was learning how to write and I'd sort of miss spellings and stuff like that, and he'd put sort of jokes in there or puzzles you know, or riddles or something like that, and I'd write back what the answer was, see, that kind of thing. And even if that only happened, say once in a year, sort of a low frequency isn't it, I have to compare it to the kids in the street right, cos that's significant as well, they were even, if anything, even more deprived than we were. Some of my pals in the street, one particular
20 friend I remember, we were both about ten - she could, she knew her letters but she couldn't read 'n' write - we used to, I've just realised now, we used to write stories together. Sort of find a bit of paper and sit and make things up or write poems, well rhyming things, that was it, and drew pictures, that kind of thing.

Have you saved any of them?

Oh no, no, no, no, if for no other reason than lack of, I mean we didn't have paper. I mean I used to, I said about

not having books in the house, but I can remember drawing and writing in the margins of books, the bit of white down the side and you know somebody, I can't remember, maybe my sister saying, "My dad'll give you Hell", you know, for doing that to his book, but he never. He must have discovered it, but he never complained. I mean I can just imagine what I'd do if my child had written in any of my, you know like the one or two books I had, and my stupid kid was writing in the margins. I'd go mad now, but he
10 didn't ever, so that's like encouragement. I consider that encouragement that he never criticised it.

He also used to, like one of the things that we were taught in school, to Hell with the content, but we were taught neat handwriting, right and good punctuation and stuff like that. My dad used to do copperplate writing sort of beautifully, really nice to look at. He was the person in the street that people came to if they wanted letter writing done. I think a lot of people maybe couldn't read 'n' write well, they could probably read 'n' write but not sufficiently well, so he used to sort of sit
20 down and write letters for them, on their behalf and stuff like, that even if the content mightn't've been great the appearance was good, so neat, and put inscriptions in books and that for them. So nice writing, and I also learnt how to do copperplate, but from him, not from school. Sort of Irish language you can't do copperplate in the sort of, if orthographic's the right word, the style of writing doesn't - English, that's the kind of lettering

you can do copperplate in, in Irish it's more, there's more angles on it so it doesn't flow.

So you're getting a lot of negatives. [L] But it was just that. It just wasn't - I mean I'm trying to think of things that would support reading and writing as a young person - but it just wasn't around. And I think I was luckier than, like most of the children in our street would've been even worse off. Like if there were less than half a dozen books in our house, including the dictionary, 10 there were none in many of the houses that I've gone into, just none, and not even sort of space to do things in. Bigger family [...] well that's a bit of an oddity, we'd four children in our family, that I used to think was a small family, and when I thought about it afterwards, a lot of the houses had one or two children in. They didn't have the big families that you tend to think about in Irish families, not in our street anyway [?]. But very like, from just extreme sort of deprivation, you know.

So how did you come to go to the school that you went to?
20 Don't know. I asked my older sister what I was doing there. I did go to this other school, it was called a model school, and my middle sister went there as well, the pair of us went there -

What age was that?

This was I think from about six, like in infants, and she went on, she stayed on at that school and I went over to

the other school. And one of the things that happened when I was in the infants school, they asked me to - I could already draw and they were surprised that I could draw, [L] the fact that I always drew cats right sitting on stools and stuff like that you know, I seemed to stick to the same kind of thing - they asked me to do some letters one day, come up to the board right, the blackboard, gave me a piece of chalk. They'd asked some other children to do a letter D right, and my surnames D. right, my first
10 name is S., but at home they used to call me Doreen, dunno why, so the letter D is fairly significant right, and I could do - I don't know why they picked on D - so I just went up and did [.] oh and they wanted a D in Irish right, but I did a copperplate D, and the teacher was really sort of pleased, you know. She said, "Oh!", like you can do it, and then she did an Irish D which is a bit like - I haven't got an example here but it's a bit like the Greeks do as well, it's anyway a different kind of a letter - and as soon as she did it I remember saying something, "Oh
20 yes!" like you sort of reminded me about something, and she seemed to recognise that as a sort of some kind of intelligence. I was about six by this time, but then we didn't do things like letters very much, and maybe that swung things that maybe I could go into this other class. I can't think of any other test that we ever did but maybe I was showing some kind of ability. This other school I went to by the way was, I think you were meant to have some abilities to get in it. I mean we were only seven, six or seven, so there was no test or anything but some

kind of aptitude I think was required, and maybe I was the token poor kid.

Was it a fee paying school?

No, no, but you had to buy your own books and pencils and we didn't have uniform, but they decided, I think when I was about 12, they decided that maybe it would be a good idea if we had a school uniform, so I [?] remember getting sort of like a blue gymslip and white blouse I think it was, something like that. I mean I think the idea of it
10 was to have something, it was post-independence right, to have some sort of place where you could, the children who went there could get a grounding in Irish language and mores or what have you, to fit them for professional life sort of thing, cos most of the girls there would've gone on to become teachers themselves, or one girl wanted to be a journalist I remember. And like they would've gone on to secondary school and like that wasn't for the likes of me. Some would've done scholarships and so on. I was actually in the scholarship class at one point, but even then I
20 knew I couldn't make it, I didn't have the whatever it takes to get things together to [.] like I didn't have, it's this thing to do with backing, and your enthusiasm goes. I remember feeling sort of despondent and not knowing where I was up to with things, and finding it quite a hard struggle as well. This history bit [?] [L] and sort of history's quite important and that [...]

Did you have subjects you particularly enjoyed or hated

when you were there?

I think I liked the language, and we didn't do any drawing. There was no sort of [...] we had subjects like sort of [...] we didn't really have Irish, cos Irish was there right, but you did Irish grammar sometimes and you know, things like parsing and that, in English as well, and I thought that was a sort of game, I liked it. And I liked writing essays and like say geography and stuff like that. There were aspects of geography I didn't like, but a
10 lot of it was to do with the fact of getting the answers right, and I liked getting the answers right, and when I got the answers wrong, like again this is something when you look back you realise, I actually began to realise it then, that one of the reasons I couldn't get the answers right is that I didn't have access to the information. We used to do things like freehand drawing, but you were expected to do sort of maps of certainly Ireland, and fill in quite a lot of detail without any reference to a book, you know put in all the sort of rivers and the counties
20 and stuff like that, and once you got practice at doing it you could do it, England the same. I never knew how to do China. [L] I never learnt China [L] and I realised afterwards why that like China didn't come into the curriculum that much, it was a bit of an unknown even then, and the maps of Europe, which was during the war, it was changing so much, like boundaries were being drawn and redrawn. But America [...] geography was alright and that was because it involved drawing and the notion of far away places as well, sort of names like American names [?] like

Albuquerque, and sort of a lot of place names, and African and South American names and that, they were fascinating and they sort of, that your imagination could sort of roam, even if factually I didn't really know much about the sort of cultures in those places. Because we had a sort of colonialist approach again, certainly to Africa, sort of Ireland's got a lot of sort of missionaries, or had a lot, still has a lot of missionaries going to places like South America and Central America and Africa. And I
10 can't remember who, I know this is true but I can't remember if it was in our classroom or if I just made it up, that there used to be a box for the pennies for the black babies (3) and stuff like that, that caper. So that was sort of going on, and I've run out of things to say.

Right. What about creative writing at school? I mean were you encouraged to do creative writing?

Well we had, for creative writing [L] we had things like, this is English, "A Day in the Life of a Penny", right. [L] D'you know that one? A teapot, I remember a teapot and
20 we had to, we did one about an old woman one day, a favourite old woman that we know, and I was sort of you know, going on about chintz curtains, I loved the word chintz right, [L] chintz curtains, and we all got a ticking off right, I remember cos we were all sort of romanticising about old womanhood. They all had rosy cheeks and all this kind of stuff, and I remember the teacher telling us off that, like she was white haired and we didn't connect it with her actually, just this fantasy

old woman but she was saying that old age wasn't like that. She knew, we didn't know right, but we were very, we'd sort of cosy old ladies and grannies and stuff. So that would've been English. I'm trying to think of Irish titles, and I can't think of like subjects in Irish that I would've done. I think maybe it was because they wanted to practice dialogue or something, I seem to remember putting inverted commas around a lot of things, [L] and like an argument at home, sort of writing something about an
10 argument, like a quarrel, like having an argument, so having a lot of dialogue in the [.] what I can remember is the inverted comma right, and direct speech and stuff like that. [L] I can't remember sort of much about the particular essays.

Did you ever write poems at school? Were you asked to?
No, no, like not as the required thing at school. We, again like the kind of things we learnt about we [.] there was a lot of time taken up with religion right, and I did miss a lot of school, that sort of maybe important as
20 well, so maybe they did it the days when I was off. [L] But they had, like the kind of English poems that we did would've been I think it's Tennyson, sort of about the crooked crag - they liked aliteration our school - "The Eagle" I think and "The Daffodils", which I still like, I still like that poem [?]. [L] I'm trying to think [.] oh there were English, like Irish poems written in English. One about an old woman, an old woman of the roads. It's a bit of an irony this, cos this would've been one of the

dispossessed right, and it's ironic that they were quite snobbish in our school, and didn't understand the poor at all, and yet they had stuff like this on the curriculum, homeless people and that. I'm trying to think of [...] God they all seem to come out in English despite what I said earlier. The poet-soldier called Padraig Pearse. But these would've been poems by other people that we were encouraged to learn, but we weren't encouraged to write any of our own at all. I don't think there would've been a thing
10 other than the essay. There wasn't anything called creative writing, I don't think that was, I don't think they felt we could do, handle that.

Can you remember any of the books you were asked to read?
No. [P] No, we didn't [P] I'm trying to think now if we had, we wouldn't have had a book, we'd've had a book with excerpts in it, like a reader maybe, but I can't remember the title. But the kind of books you were expected to read would've been a history book [L] right, the geography book
-

20 *Not fiction?*

that sort of functional - yeah. But this Annie M. P. Smithson aforementioned right, that was an approved one. D'you remember a book called, a magazine called The Girls' Crystal? The Girls' Crystal was sort a bit of a jolly hockeysticks right, about the 1940s. Somebody brought that into the school and there was all Hell let loose [L] you know, reading stuff like that at all. They were very

disapproving of that, so I think it was around about that time we were told more or less what we could read, and if they knew I was reading the Red Letter [L] they'd go mad. [L] They'd go bananas.

Did you do that sort of reading with friends then and the swapping of things?

Right. The Girls' Crystal I didn't. I wasn't all that friendly with any of the girls in school. I had one friend, Deirdre, and I don't know quite why we got on but
10 she was always nice to me, put it that way. The rest were a bit [...] the attitude in the school encouraged what I call sort of sneakiness and tale telling and stuff like that, and all manner of you know, nastiness I think, so I didn't really like a lot of the girls in school for good, like for very good reasons, and they didn't approve of me either. But girls in our street at home, I can remember they had - see we didn't buy books in our house or buy magazines rather, at all, even the Girls' Crystal, because
20 of this money thing, couldn't afford it - I didn't mention comics, Beano, Dandy [?] - but we used to borrow from people in the street, and I could go to their houses and read the Girls' Crystal and that I really liked, I really liked those as well and the serial and stuff like that in it and [...] But I mean it was completely, they were about boarding school, sort of little rich kids [L] absolutely nothing to do with us. But there wasn't much written about children like us, there wasn't anything like that. You keep getting nos.

But what about the Beano and the Dandy? Did you partake of those?

Beano and the Dandy, read it, read it. [?] the pictures cover to cover. [L] But they used to have stories in those as well. They had some kind of a detective in it, I can't remember, he used to wear a bowler hat. I think that was the [?], and there were certain sort of regular features, so I didn't just look at the pictures. I mean I think had I had books around - I'm being honest about this - I think
10 I would've read a lot more, and I don't think I would've even needed the encouragement. And then there was this neighbour who lived a couple of doors down who was alcoholic, [L] she used to send me for porter anyway, [L] and used the booklending as a sort of subterfuge for grabbing hold of me [L] to send me to the pub [L] to get her a jug of porter. But she used to lend me sort of like, well love interest kind of stories and I quite liked them, but I don't think there was anything very much in them, they weren't at all harmful I don't think, [?] not at all.

20 And there's nothing else until I remember my sister got her second job, right, she was saving to go to America and she used to work in a shop where they sold sweets and tobacco and stuff like that, but they also had a lending library in the shop. She brought books home from there that were, well really sort of, I dunno quite what category to put them into, but they were misogynystic and stuff like that you know, and I remember reading sort of some of them, but I would've been about 16 by that time.

But I'm still interested to read them, but they weren't, like I didn't like those books particularly, I just read them because they were something in print that I could get hold of.

But you could pick up on the feeling from them as well?

Yeah. They were, like if anyone was going to get punished in the story it was going to be a woman, and I can probably relate those stories now, maybe if I thought about it, try and get at the messages behind them and that is don't step out of line. I can't remember the authors. One of them was made into a film that I saw on television a couple of years ago and sort of recognised, quite a bad film as well, again to do with keeping the woman in her place. But I can't remember any book that I read that gave me a good feeling. Like even, I mentioned about A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, that I think is an excellent book like and [.] but the bit I read was for me almost the worst bit of it, and it was to do with the whole area to do with guilt and that, and if I'd read on to the end, which I didn't, then it might, like the whole story might've been different, my own story might've been different. I just happened to pick out the bit to do with his guilt about sexuality and stuff like that, and I don't think I was getting into that at that particular point, I wasn't old enough in some respects, but it sort of was teaching me in advance what to feel guilty about. As if the priests weren't already doing that from the pulpit, [L] you know. I like, I don't know what other areas, what

other angles I can give on this. Maybe it's not bad, you know maybe [...] it's true anyway what I'm describing to you, it's a situation.

What about your reading since you left school or since you came to England?

My eldest sister's husband encouraged me to read. And when I used to see him, after he'd say hello and how d'you do an' all, he'd always say, "Have you read any good books lately?" right, and I usually hadn't. And I remember one
10 of the books he lent me, he'd always offer to lend me books, you know, have a look at this and this is a good one, and one of them was Arthur Miller's Focus, that I read when I was maybe 19 or 20 or something like that. That I really liked. In the period between 16 and 20 I think I hardly read at all, and I couldn't find anything in books. I mean I think I was probably doing other things as well. I can't remember what was occupying me at the time, but I wasn't particularly interested in reading. But this book - or I'd pick up a book and read the first or
20 second pages of it and put it down again, I couldn't get an interest in books at all - but that book Focus, as well as the fact that I'd just started wearing specs, I remember it seemed to have some meaning in it and I liked it. I just can't think of titles. I remember reading one sort of cowboy, but it was to do with the revolution in, maybe it was somewhere in Mexico or something like that, but I can't remember the title. A series of short stories. And he lent me this book and I lent it to somebody else

and never got it back, I couldn't get it replaced. It was called The Big Box Car. It was to do with it was American stories and that was like a lot of people in a box car, you know, sort of hobo or what-have-you in America, and they're each telling their story. I liked - and I'm trying to think now - I remember reading Candide, that I loved, in English. I really liked that. And not an awful lot. I was sort of nursing by this time, and sort of worn out and tired, and studying as well, so I didn't really read all
10 that much, and this sort of with opportunities with sort of books around. I think I read that Victor Hugo one about Quasimodo, that one, Hunchback of Notre Dame I remember reading, and finding it very sentimental but then as I got older I started to understand why. Like some of the sentiment was to do with a child I remember [....] that recorder [L] and I should've made a list of these maybe.

This is sort of about into my twenties and, then I think I didn't read, hardly read in my thirties. I just can't think off hand. I remember when I was in hospital having
20 my son, I don't know who wrote it, I think it's called The Darling Buds of May right. Does it ring a bell? It's from a poem, it's from a sonnet, I think it was Shakespeare [?], about the darling buds of May, and it's to do with making the most of your youth because you're a long time old, and that was a nice light sort of book. But again I wasn't in the mood for it. I remember it was sort of well intentioned, again it was my brother-in-law who gave it, sent it in for me. But I noticed a lot of the women in the

hospital reading comics, young women reading books with picture stories in them, you know the - I don't know if they were just being brought out around that time - I don't mean Dandy and Beano comics, but sort of romance stories with pictures in them, right. And I don't know if that was to do with their literacy level, or sort of feeling that you were so caught up in the experience of having a kid that you didn't want to concentrate on anything, I don't know if that's true or what, or just a
10 mixture maybe. And then when I went to, it's a big jump I realise now, sort of going to college and that and doing a fair bit of reading some of which -

Did you take English as a subject then?

Yeah. Sort of people like Dickens and [L] [?] - come on you can do better than that - reading sort of American stories. But then this other thing too - the inadequacy bit that I mentioned earlier - because I'm Irish I felt I should've known about Joyce, and who was the other fellow around a lot, [L] I should know a lot of plays, and be a
20 lot into some notion of storytelling in Ireland. I'm not, right. Because I'm in England, I should know all about like English and the literature, and there's sort of a whole lot over in Russia as well, [L] and I should've read [.] oh I remember another book that I liked - wierd sort of taste - and that's Metamorphosis, Kafka, I liked. And reading, I don't know if it was The Brothers Karamazov, but some Russian short stories that I remember reading and liking, but I can't remember who the sort of author is.

There's one about - I liked the sort of messages in them-
one about somebody running a race to get land. He could
have as much land as he could circumnavigate before the
sun went down and he dropped down dead at the end of it
and they buried him in six feet by [.] that kind of thing
I liked right, really miserable.

Moral again, isn't it.

Yeah, right. We're back to college. I think I [?] sociol-
ogy at the same time, and I tended to like the sort of
10 books that were not so much - well maybe sociology is a
fiction [L] - but I tended to like books that were, what
was the other category? I've lost a word here and it's to
do with books other than fiction I think, and I can't
remember how you describe them, not fact but - there's
gonna be a big space there. I'm looking for a particular
word and I can't find it. Cos I like reading sociology and
I began to like history that's another thing.

So more theoretical sorts of things.

That's right, that would cover it fine, yeah. Reading, not
20 really ancient history, but history I started to like and
take an interest in as well. And like also something
that's happened in say the past twenty years is this
switch, like a re-examining of history, that's another
thing. When I was at school it was definite, and it was
all known, there was no bias in it right, [L] it was fact,
and like I like the notion, even if I couldn't do it, like
the notion of people sort of examining their own proced-

ures and stuff like that, that kind of thing. So eventually I got round to reading Ulysses, and a bit more Joyce, I like reading. [P] I think that's about it, that I can, I mean I don't know if, it's sort of quite sketchy and like maybe [...]

Well can you remember any particular favourites? You know if you had to name say a favourite book -

I think probably my favourite book would be Dubliners, Joyce's Dubliners, and it's, there's an odd thing about
10 it, and I remember reading that about 15 or so years ago, more than 15 years ago, and finding it difficult to read. I think it might, somebody might've recommended it, so I read it and couldn't really relate to it, right, it seemed like a strange notion of what Dublin is about. And yet something happened to change my mind about that, because I went back to reading it again over five years ago, and wondering why I'd had that first impression about it, because I think it's exactly as I sort of [.] it'd either changed my experience of the place or the people. It's
20 more [.] or even if it's written around about the turn of the century right, it has a feel to it that's very like the feel I remember about Dublin, and like it could be that it's manufactured my feeling about Dublin, it could be that, but I think maybe it exposed, it brought home to me what, like the kind of life that was going on, that I didn't want to recognise, or couldn't, cos it's quite painful, some of the things that were happening at the time. Like it's a way of revealing I suppose, like the

nature of the place and the people, like the thing about not being able to do much about the situation and that. I mean somebody else has written about Dublin of my time, a young man called Christy Brown, died a couple of years ago, whose, I think it's cerebral palsey, I can't remember. He wrote a very lively sort of account of people who will've seen the place as sort of lively and all that kind of stuff. I didn't particularly, so that my impression of it would be more in accord with people who were a bit more
10 desparate perhaps. So that I like and I do like [...]

Did you have a favourite poem - out of the ones you were made to remember?

I [P] actually I think I liked that the Daffodils [L] one and I think I can remember all of it. But I also, yeah, there's another one that we learnt called "The Mother", and it's to do with [...] oh there's one in Irish that I remember, and again it's to do with people sort of, like it's a, I don't know if it's a tragic thing, it's sort of describing a woman whose son is buried and she's by his
20 grave. But I liked that because of the rhythm of it, it's sort of a very nice sort of rhythm, and there's poems that I can't remember all the language. The rhythm of Irish poetry's lovely, it's got a different meter to it, I can't remember the meter to it now, but it's Irish language and it's got a nice sound to it. But then I like the sound of French, like I understand a bit of French, I like the sound of Italian probably better than I do English. I don't think English, maybe it's because we speak it and

take it for granted, I don't think English sounds all that well. But it's got [...] if you understand the meaning that's another sort of level of looking at it. So back to [...] I think Daffodils [L] will do. Something to do with the "inward eye" you know, like I liked that notion of casting your mind back and remembering things that are not present anymore and making them present.

How about characters - are there any characters that you particularly remember?

10 [P] Do you mean as a child, reading as a child? It's really sparse, I'm digging around.

Or anything, you know, any character that you've read about that you've been struck by.

God. [P] Well to go back to this Joyce Dubliners thing, there are a lot of them. I'll try and pick out one of them, and it's a man who begrudges, well I think he begrudges, or he's struck by the fact that his wife, somebody loved his wife in their youth, right. It's something he discovered about his wife, well she told him,
20 and I think he's upset by the fact that when she was young somebody loved her to distraction, well loved her a lot. And that character, it's like being sort of, I suppose, hit by a truck. I can't remember like how the thing goes as far as the character's concerned, but I remember thinking what a blow for him. Like you know when they're, he's criticising her and then he finds out about this thing, she tells him this thing about her past, and it's almost like, not revenge, but it's as if she's somehow

been able to get even, but that's not doing it justice either. But it's just as if people unconsciously can hurt other people, even if in some ways he deserved it, but it still must've hurt him.

There's that one, that feeling of a revelation kind of thing, but there's another one, I can't remember the title of it, and it's to do with a maid in a house and people playing a trick on her. I can't remember the - it's ages since I read these [?] - I can't remember the detail of
10 it, but somebody plays a trick on this maid and I think they mean it - cos sometimes people, I remember doing it, teasing people when I was a kid, and doing it cos I liked them and I wanted to show them that I was taking notice of them, but I was being cruel really. [L] It would've been better if I'd just been polite and left them alone [?] did, but these, I could never work out in this story whether they were doing it because they were little brats right, just being unkind, or whether in some way they wanted to make her feel one of them and played this trick.
20 I can't remember what the trick is about either. [L] So it's sort of like people feeling bad I think I can remember about those stories. There's a priest in sort of, right at the beginning of the story, just going bonkers right, sort of utterly guilt-laden cos see he dropped the sacrament, and he's I think he loses his reason cos that's a terrible thing to do. I mean today we'd say so what, you know, it fell right, but he feels very guilty about it. It's in the days before [.] did you ever have communion?

Yeah.

Did you have it in your hand?

Yeah [...]

This was utterly -

[.....]

CHANGE OF TAPE

Do you watch the television much?

A fair bit. I've started to ration myself, but for instance yesterday I couldn't resist watching Othello,
10 they had Othello with John Carney in, and I'm glad I saw it. I stayed up late last night to watch it. So this [.] I try to miss out the game shows around right, but there's certain sort of things that maybe I think I'd be better off doing something different, but then I have to watch them to see how bad they are.

Like what?

I can't think now, maybe some films. I watched the Maltese Falcon - which is an odd thing right, I'd seen it years ago and I had a different memory of how the story went,
20 which is odd. And I began to think that they'd made the Maltese Falcon 2 or something like that, [L] cos I remembered more killings in it and different sort of incidents, and I remembered an outcome of actually finding - d'you know the story?

No I don't actually, I don't know it.

It's about a golden bird that gets painted over in black.

At the end of this one the other night it was lead, it was a lead bird right, painted over in black, but I remember, I've got some, maybe I've made it up in some way in my own head, that when he scraped the black off there was gold glistening underneath. So it was either a concoction of mine [L] or the sort of alternative Maltese Falcon. [L] Years ago, the reason I was pleased about the Othello last night was years ago I saw Laurence Olivier, you know, blacked up to do Othello. Everybody was in praise of it, 10 and I was really angry about that, that play, that interpretation of it, and I was really angry about it and I didn't like it at all. And I used to hate it when I heard people saying afterwards how wonderful he - I think he's great, I think Olivier's great - but I don't think he should've done that. So this is a bit of [?] a way of getting that memory out of me. I liked it.

Is there anything you watch regularly?

Probably old films. There's been a series called Femme Fatale, anyway it's sort of film made you know, round 20 about the forties, and if I'm up at that time and know it's coming I'll tend to watch those, if only to see like the attitudes towards women and that, and see some of the sort of styles of film you know, film-making and things. And usually you get a bit of a talk before hand which I also quite like if I catch that, I quite like it. It makes me watch out for things, like different things that otherwise I wouldn't've noticed, I'd've missed seeing. So those are really the sort of things I watch, sort of black

and white -

Do you watch any of the soaps?

Soaps no, no, not at all. I see I think maybe the Brook, what's it called?

Brookside.

Right. It's the one that I've seen more of and that would be less than ten minutes a week, and it's just by accident if I put it on and it's on, and by the time I discover what it is that's as much as I watch it. And it isn't
10 because I dislike it, the bits I've seen I quite like, but I think you can just get to wanting, it's a bit like the serial in the magazine, you want to watch the next one. Coronation Street I've stopped watching years ago. The Dallas and Dynasty things, I couldn't tell you one from the other. There's that Neighbours thing, that I just don't know. There's a late night one about Prison Cell Block something or other, I see that but I usually I think I'm just too idle and too tired or something to switch it off. I've seen bits of that and I don't follow that
20 really. So I don't watch soaps. I hear people talking about them, I dunno what they're talking about. So it's really old films and programmes like, consumer kind of programmes I watch on the telly.

Watchdog type?

That kind. That was the one I was trying to think of and couldn't. And then, I can't remember, the things like Panorama, I like and there's another one, World in Action,

those sort of programmes.

Documentary.

Documentary, that's the term, but I keep forgetting words.

[L] So those I watch, but I'd like to do a bit more reading. I'd like to sort of catch up and do a bit more. I find when I get into bed I do a bit of reading, a bit is the operative word, I just read for a couple of minutes and I feel tired I go to sleep then so -

What about contemporary films? Do you go to the cinema
10 [...]?

No, not I've not been to [...] I've got a bit of a thing about that. Not that the last film, well I missed a film, the story that I was describing, d'you remember the first character I said about, this man that I could remember, it's the story called "The Dead" right, and it was made into a film recently and I missed that. I didn't know it was showing. Somebody told me about it and I'm sorry I missed that. There was also one again that I missed, I got sick or something, about The Name of the Rose. I think
20 it's to do with some kind of Inquisition, or again it's religion. I'm very interested in religion for an atheist.
[L]

But one of the things I was a bit frightened of and that is films, since I went to them on a fairly regular basis which was about 20 years ago, that they've become a bit more graphic in their violence. I saw on television, they call it Apocalypse Now, on a little black and white telly that doesn't show up very well, and I had to turn it off a

few times. So if I was in the cinema and they have it in technicolour, I think I'd been sort of horrified by it. There was a film on called Blackout the other night, in which a woman is beaten up by a, as it happens by a man posing as her husband and she believes to be her husband, and it shows her with a sort of bloody nose and like terror and I didn't watch that. I can be really squeamish about some things, like I wouldn't like to look at the - I don't know what I'd do in the cinema. I don't know that
10 I'd walk out, I'd probably just shut my eyes or something. But I don't like, I mean I know violence happens in like for real and maybe that's the bit that worries me you know, that in Hollywood or wherever they are just acting a part after all, but in real life it's going on. It's not [?] you know. So no films, practically no films.

Do you have a favourite old film?

[P] There was one that was made in about 1958 with Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis, and it was about two escaped convicts, you know that one? I've forgotten the title. And
20 I remember that was one of I think the first films I saw as a youngish person that I actually liked, and I felt I could get into and enjoy. A lot of films that I'd seen in the 50s were a bit of a waste of time really and I didn't like them. It's funny about forgetting the title of that one, but I liked that. That's from [.] I can't remember much from the 40s.

Oh I used to go, again to do with the Arabian Nights, you

know the fantasy things, I used to go to, they made Hollywood films around about Scheherezade and all that right, story telling bit and I used to go and see those sort of technicolour. Maria Montez was the, she used to take the part of the Scheherezade character or the woman, and an actor called John Hall used to be either Harun or Rashid or like one of those sort of people, and they had [.] and Sabu, there was an actor called Sabu, I think he's Indian, I dunno, but he used to be in them. Things like
10 the magic carpet, was it the magic carpet? Sort of flying horses and stuff like that, and Sindbad the Sailor, those kind of things I used to go to.

And they made a film when I was about 13, I remember going to see and again that was on a connected theme, again it was Hollywood sort of stuff, romanticized, but about the composer Rimsky Korsakov, who's also written about that, d'you remember? And I learnt about music, that was the thing to do with film, I learnt about opera and ballet through Hollywood. Like that film, an opera, Cavalliera
20 Rusticana it was, a Hollywood version, Rimsky Korsakov was a Hollywood version, that I sort of came across those kind of things. Carmen, Hollywood again. Chopin - they made a film of a dreadful film of his life in the 40s. "My friend Liszt!" "Oh you're playing some of my music!" That was Liszt coming in talking about Chopin. Things like [.] I mean I liked those films then, and I realise now that but for those I wouldn't've known about, I suppose you could call it classical music really. Because again I didn't go

to the theatre or operas or anything like that. We used to go to sort of pantomimes and kind of music hall sort of things, but you wouldn't get much classical music - got a bit on the radio, yeah.

Well, just to change tack a bit, I mean I'd like to find out a bit about how you got into writing again then as an adult. You mentioned a friend before who encouraged you.

Right and I was reluctant to take her up on it. I didn't think what she was describing could work. But one of the
10 things like [...] I'll just recap a bit, that I'd written to her because I was distressed and I wanted help. I'd no-one to talk to and I thought of all the people that I could write to that she'd be the one who would best understand. I don't know that much that she did, but that's not her fault right. [L] She did write back and say it helped her to write. One of the things that I've found, and I don't know if it was developing her recommendation or not, one of the things that I've found helpful was to try and describe things that were troubling me. One of the
20 situations I remember, there's like several situations, but one of the things, the sort of feelings I used to, this is the nearest I can get to it, on top of the sort of distress that I experienced as a young person, and as a middle-aged or thereabouts woman, was the fact that I couldn't explain it to myself properly, I couldn't understand it properly, and as a sort of means of explaining it better to myself I tried always to find the right words and to be precise about, to describe it best.

I noticed somebody, this is in my middle-age right, and I was going to college with a woman who was around about the same age as myself, and even when she was describing a tragedy like the death of her nephew, it happened at that time, he was killed off a motorbike, even though her voice was quavering she was describing it, she was giving it words. And that, whereas had that happened to me, she was quite close to him as well, had that happened to me I'd've been crying all the time and unable to find the words. And
10 I remember thinking that part of her control and composure stemmed from the fact that she was occupied in finding the words. That isn't, that could sound like a criticism of her, it isn't. It's just a way of how she handled it and I thought it was a better way than, well maybe I don't still think that, but at the time I remember feeling a kind of envy that she could express her feelings for the lad and the event in that way, she could convey it in that way. Whereas as I say I would've been sort of bawling me eyes out, and no doubt conveying something right, but it
20 wouldn't've had, it wouldn't've helped me either right. Cos I mean I think, I'm not against crying, but I think you have to do something else, as well as crying right, to come to terms with something. Crying is alright, and it's alright for babies to cry, cos they haven't got language after all, but I think if you can find the right words it's a sort of way of bringing out what's going on inside your own heart so to speak, and you can get control of the thing better, and understand it better. And like a lot of things that happen to us, even if they may be happening to

us for the first time, maybe not, they're more than likely to happen to other people as well. We're not that unique, well we are but we're not, it's a bit of a contradiction.

So that, like one of the things that, the bit of advice from that friend in America, the writer, that I did develop it, even if initially I thought well it's not, you know it's not good advice, I did sort of take it up and started to jot things down. It also helped my memory as well in a peculiar way, in that even things that I [...] I
10 was looking round for an exercise book that I jotted things in, I was looking for it before you came and I can't find it, but I remember going back over that and I couldn't remember writing some of the things that I'd written in it. Nor did I have any memory of the things I was writing about, things to do with school and that, the sort of carry on at school right.

So then a little bit after all this happened, a couple of years ago, I went to the writers' group over in, I think it's called, somewhere near Bellevue anyway, I haven't got
20 the right area, near to Bellevue, and I remember reading a piece - we were asked to write about our schooldays right, as it happened, and I remember when people read things out one woman in particular, it seemed so uncomplicated right, and her ideas seemed so uncluttered. And I remember thinking [...] cos I'd written a piece for the same session [...] when I read my bit out by the way nobody could understand it. [L] It was very plain, it was a description

and nobody could follow what I was trying to say, I just gave a word picture of something I could remember seeing, and it was in quite a contrast to what this other woman had written. And I remember envying her, thinking oh I wish things had been like that for me at school. Cos it was happy. I can remember happy times. And I stopped going there because I felt a bit discouraged I think. It was also a bit of a distance from where I live.

And then I didn't write anything, or I might jot the odd
10 thing down or wish I could write a bit more, but I didn't do all that much. And then for some reason I started going to the Commonword workshops where I met you, the Tuesday ones, and I didn't write anything for quite a while but I would just go and listen, at least a couple of weeks I'd just go and listen. And then I had, I was inspired one day and I wanted to write something but couldn't, so I just shifted it slightly, shifted the emphasis a bit, and wrote using the same kind of words, about this area that I can't write about even today, can't sort of get into it yet, and
20 I just wrote a poem that funnily enough goes back again to the story of "The Dead" right [L] - cos I think one of the things you were interested in was influences. Now one of the things that happens at the end of, one of the descriptions at the end of "The Dead" is snow, the snowfall, there's a snowfall and the term is, "the snow was general all over Ireland". Now I've got some recollection of that being almost like a forecast, you know the weather forecast, "snow is general all over Ireland", right, and

then they give more particular kind of descriptions. And it was that thing about snow that was, like the poem that I wrote [...] because one of the things I remember about Ireland was when you woke up and there'd been a snowfall. We just had one upstairs, no we didn't, it was three upstairs windows in our house, but the particular one I used to look out of was out on to the back yard, and the snow, seeing the snow there and I knew right, that even if it looked nice, you couldn't feel good about it, cos your
10 shoes leaked and you got cold and there was a payoff to this lovely scene. So I wrote a bit, that little bit anyway, and that was the first thing that I ever took in to Commonword. And they followed it, they understood it and liked it, and I felt encouraged by that and I just kept going from then. But I don't write all that much anyway. Or rather I write bits, have ideas, make a few scrappy notes on bits of paper and I don't seem to develop them. I'm always postponing the time when I'll get down and do them. D'you do that?

20 Mm, all the time.

Oh! It's good that people do that right. Cos I mean it's good that you're telling me that you do that, [L] cos I don't feel as bad then. Cos like I think, oh I've got ideas but I can't develop, I can't get round to doing, you know to -

What kind of things do you write? I mean is it stories or poems or descriptions?

I think a lot of it will be, of what I do, probably the

majority is autobiographical. If it's autobiographical then it'll be like events that happened, particularly when I was younger. That description that nobody could understand by the way, I worked on that a little while ago again. I took it into Commonword and people liked it. [L] It was worked over, it wasn't as, not bleak, what was the term, it wasn't as stripped bare. I thought that was a clever thing to do at one point, I thought it was the thing to do. I still like that, I like the idea of paring
10 everything back, but I think I rather overdid it that particular time. But, so it'll be a thing I think at [.] I think I find poetry slightly easier, and I'm not sure why. I think it's because now if there's three, say roughly three, areas and they're not entirely separate, say there's poetry, prose and dialogue, I know they overlap, I find dialogue the most difficult thing to do. I can't seem to get the knack of how people talk right, how people sort of, the words they actually use, the expressions and that. I find it extremely difficult. So that, the other two I
20 think it would be about balanced, but I think I might find poetry slightly easier for some reason and I think it's that there's less likely to be this thing about dialogue in it, it can be in it but it's less likely. And one of the things I've noticed too is that I tend to get a phrase in my head, and it won't go, and that's what I'll use, I'll have that in the first say stanza or something like [...]

So do you write sort of very formal poetry then? When you said stanza, do you stick to a rhyme pattern or form or -

And it doesn't always work out either. I have [...] in Irish, the language, you get near rhymes, they don't have to be, it's called assonance I think. [...] have to know these terms. But it doesn't have to be exactly [...] in English it's often easier to because of the way the language sounds. I use that as an excuse right but also I don't want to force something, cos I don't have the skill yet right, that I'll do near rhyme and like I'm more interested in the meaning right, sort of thing, in it than
10 in getting the even the metre right and stuff like that. That one I was saying about the snow is a [...]. There's a near rhyme in it and even the stanzas aren't, they're not all sort of properly patterned. And it isn't because that fits in with the overall idea of the poem, it's just I didn't know how, I don't have the skill to sort of shape it any better than that. And I would never do anything that's entirely you know, those non-rhyming ones, because I think that's skill, another kind of skill, and that's almost more like prose to me and I think I maybe have some
20 difficulty - maybe rhyming is easier that gives an impression of formality. They're not all that formal actually, the bits I've done.

Formal probably wasn't the right word to use -

Yeah but it's good cos it gives the notion of form as well right, as well as the sound of being proper, right. So let me think. I had thought [...] I was listening to a programme on Irish radio the other night - I haven't written this, but I'm thinking about it - and it was to do with anti-

Black racism in Ireland and there was an incident when I took my son, years and years ago, I took him to Ireland, something happened and I felt really bad about it at the time but I didn't do anything, couldn't do anything, and when I was listening to these women talking on the radio - a sort of Woman's Hour, it's called Liveline, - listening to them talking about their experiences, one of them was awful, but it reminded me of this incident that happened to me, that I never would've dreamt of writing about and
10 then suddenly I had it, the sort of revenge thing again, of getting my own back on people who behaved badly towards us, and I thought, oh yeah, I'd like to write about that. But that would be, they're only like incidents, like certain things that happen in lives, and it happened to be happening to me that day and so, and there were other people involved as well, and that would come out as a prose piece not a poem.

D'you choose what's to go into a poem or what's to go into a story or -

20 I don't think so, no. I'm trying to think now if I could [...] see I haven't done all that much and like maybe if I say [...] see me in a years time right, I can sort of plan it a bit more, something to give [...] I think you know the, when I said about the phrase coming in your head right, there's one that was a dream. I'm interested in dreams right. There's one that came to me in a sort of dream thing, and I, somebody said to me when I read it out, that I should do a sort of a story round it, and I never could,

I actually couldn't, it would still have to stay in the form of a poem, dunno why. It's not being stubborn, it just wouldn't do anything. I think if the phrase comes and, it's something to do with the sound of the way that the words are expressed, that's more likely to come out in a poem, whereas if it's an incident that I can, especially if it's autobiographical, that's more likely to come out in, it's all autobiographical in some way, it's more likely to come out in a, not even a story cause they're
10 just like descriptions, just incidents that happened of [.] like you'd be in one mood, that's what I notice in the little bit I've done, the day might start off in a particular mood and something happens, and it usually ends on a down, [L] it usually ends with defeat, you know what I mean. It's not very positive is it? But maybe that'll change.

D'you usually write in English then?

Yeah. I tried, when my grandson was born I thought well now's the time to start writing little poems to him in
20 Irish, my Irish isn't that good see, but I did write sort of small bits, but mostly welcome like, and I hope he understands it. [L] I'd like to write in Irish, and then it would be poetry again because of the rhythm thing.

CHANGE OF TAPE

Right what sort of things do you like writing the best then, I mean what d'you get the most pleasure from?

I think the, even if it sounds a bit perverse, [L] I probably like the thing about coming to being able to take control in writing over a situation that when it happened I'd no control. I think I've gone through life as a victim, that sounds pathetic doesn't it! I've gone through life not being able to fight back, or not winning, well at odd times being able to fight back, but being weakened by it, not being able to keep the thing going. I've won a few sort of little skirmishes I suppose. That sounds as if I
10 go round thinking it, I think maybe I do think in terms of life as a sort of battle ground. I do have that thing of sort of coming up against opposition and either winning or losing, and more often than not there's a sort of losing element in it on my own behalf. I've won a few things when other people's been involved as I've not given in that easily. So writing is to sort of write, to put down, maybe just to make intelligible to me quite what went on and what were the possibilities as well. And sadly I can't see me, maybe it's not so sad, I can't see other sort of easy
20 possibilities, you know what I mean, the sort of predicaments that I was in and I didn't know how to, I didn't have the confidence or the information or anything else to change them [?] break a few heads. [L] Oh God, I couldn't-
've done that. [L] If I'd've done that, you see this is it, if I'd've done that I'd've felt really bad about putting somebody else down. D'you know what I mean? You sort of constrain yourself all the time. Like if I won an argument, I'd feel guilty over winning it. It must've been easy to win as well - it's a bit back to the 2ii business

(4), you know, like there's no triumph in it - and if you lose it you say to yourself, oh all the clever things you could've said you know -

Is that why you stick to autobiography then to get this sense of control?

Yeah, and I don't know anything else as well. I did write a thing - again we were asked, again it's Commonword, we go by topics sometimes, we don't always have to - and we were asked to write a children's story. So I set out
10 thinking right, this is going to be about something different, but I did pick the backyard to start it off in, but it was going to be something that had nothing whatsoever to do with me, but I ended up having a dialogue again, and I remember as a small child sort of going out into the back yard and having this, not exactly a dialogue, but thinking about the world and the problems and so on, and that's precisely what I did in the story. [L] So it's still, even when I'm trying to make it different, it still seems to come back to what I'd call my own ex-
20 perience - a bit of navel-gazing I suppose.

I dunno it's quite often a strength in people's writing.

Yeah. I don't know how to [...] it might be good sometime to, for instance what I'd like to do maybe is to start off, to write a story that is blatantly what happened to me right, and then to switch it. I've thought of doing this as a kind of exercise, so as I can give the other person's perspective on it right, and how they see me. But

[L] I don't know what'll happen, only seeing me as I see myself right, but I mean that'd be sort of a good way to change things.

Have you ever sort of consciously been influenced by other people's writing or tried to model a particular style?

I seem to remember doing that sometimes as a sort of exercise that, with other people, writing in particular style, but I can't remember who it was now. I think it was Edgar Allan Poe, it could've been Edgar Allan Poe, writing
10 some kind of ghost story or something like that. I can't remember when I did that even if, how recent it is or far off, and actually quite liking it. I quite liked [.] I thought it was going to be very difficult to do. I don't say it was that successful, but it was quite fun, it was fun to do that. I think it was Edgar Allan Poe, and like there were certain elements that you just put into it like creaking doors and stuff like that and sort of blood-curdling sounds and so on. Once they were in it, it was [.] I don't know I'm sure there's more to Edgar Allan Poe
20 than this. [L] [?]. [L] That's all I can remember though about, yeah I've done that sort of thing but not off my own bat.

And I have some notion, again a sort of bit of a fantasy of, of all the people, like Joyce would be sort of the model for me that I like. I don't mean the Ulysses kind of thing or Finnegan's Wake, I don't mean those. I could never do those and they've been done anyway. But even a

few times now I've thought there's no point in writing, cos Joyce has said it all right, about the kind of interests I have right, that is Dublin and religion and Ireland and all that sort of stuff, and you know, getting away from it. But he's male right, and I thought women haven't, like a girl, a woman hasn't written that story and maybe if I could do it slightly, I don't say do it differently, use him as a sort of jumping off point kind of thing, but describe my experiences then that mightn't
10 be a bad idea, cos I don't know who else is doing it. D'you know what I mean? I mean I hope I'm not conceited right, it sounds conceited, writing like Joyce. But I mean the other person - Edna O'Brien's sort of written about Ireland and that, and there's a lot in what she writes that I can sort of recognise and so on, but again she's got a different sort of, although she writes about Dublin she hasn't, she's got a like different perspective on the thing, and there's an element of different social class as well. [?] I'd like to sort of do something -

20 *How about Meave Binchey? Have you read any of hers?*

I've seen it on the television rather than reading it, you know. I've seen it in Safeways I think, one of the books. And her stories, I would say I've met in Dublin, I've met the people that she writes about, the kind of, well some of the preoccupations [.] but that's a bit unfair, I mean I [P] I think there's more trouble going on than she writes about. I mean there are people around like she writes, they're there, but there's been there's a lot of

suffering going on as well, a lot of people in trouble over marriage - I mean she writes about people I think, about people with marriage difficulties say [L] stuff like that. That's a bit unfair to her I think. But I mean there's a lot of, a lot more hurt going on I think than ever comes out, or the bits that - I'm judging her through the television not [?] I shouldn't really be commenting on her - but there's a lot of I suppose angst, and sort of practical problems going on there, that Ireland just wont
10 come to terms with, as a country. It wont, you know there's, it's very conservative and narrow-minded and stuff. It was very bad in even my day and sometimes I think, well it's moved on, in some aspects it's moved on, but then you hear about like there still isn't divorce for instance, and for God's sake like things like access to, for women anyway, well for both of them, but the women that carry the baby literally, the access to contraception and stuff like that, and information as well. I mean it's bad enough here you know, for young people to get informa-
20 tion, but it's a lot better here than it is there, and there's problems here with youngsters, you know sort of ignorance and stuff but there it's really bad and it's not acknowledged at all [...]

I mean, to change the focus a bit, I mean I've asked you about your parents and the sort of reading and writing relationships there, how about between you and your son, I mean did you try and in a sense make up for things and read to him, or was there not the time?

He, it's funny about him, he learnt to read when he was about four, right. We weren't supposed to teach our children to read, teaching was for the teachers right, parents keep out, and he was going mad to learn how to read, and I was frightened in case I did the wrong thing and taught him, right. But despite hanging back he still seemed to be able to recognise the words coming up, so it was almost as soon as he started school that he was reading. And I was delighted [L] because one of the books
10 that he loved reading was, d'you know the Reverend Audrey stories about railways, about, oh God, they're Tommy the tank engine, oh I can't remember the names, about engines and that. They do them on kids -

Yeah, Thomas the Tank Engine.

That's [?]. Well I hated them, I couldn't stand them [L] and well, I was delighted when he used to read to himself. Poor child, he used to read himself to sleep at night. And he's one of those that could, I'm sort of pleased about it, but I envy him as well, that you could sort of ask
20 him, talk to him, and he's not conscious if he's looking at a book. Or he used to when he was living with me anyway, but maybe that's something that children do, that you can talk to him and he didn't seem to hear you. And he read, I think by the time he was about ten he'd read more than I, even to this day, have read. He reads a lot. I'm pleased about that and it's almost nothing to do with me at all. He just seemed to like it, does it for leisure and pleasure and all the rest of it, and it's good. And also I mean partly through taking him round libraries and things

like that, and I suppose encouraging him and like buying him books, and I did a bit of reading to him when he couldn't read, and I told him stories as well, like the ones that I learned in school, like the sort of mythology and things, you know some of those. And I told him and he still remembers them, and I remember he said, well his girlfriend when he met her said that he told her, she's English right, he told her Irish fairystories, folk stories, and stuff like that. So that even if I didn't
10 learn them exactly at my mother's knee, I think learning them, no matter where you learn them from, it's good that you then pass them on you know, so [...]

Did that link in to your writing at all or was it at a totally separate time, the reading and the story telling with the child - I mean presumably it's earlier than when you picked up the writing again?

Right, it is earlier. I don't think it connected. I remember it was good from the point of view of the relationship, though we've always had a good relationship
20 anyway, but it added to it as well. And it was a way of, like another sort of dimension, a way of telling something that wasn't exactly true, like it wasn't factual, but it gives an attitude like across, because like one of the stories was to do with, it wasn't strictly speaking one of the myths, but it was to do with perspective I remember, you might know it, to do with a child looking across the valley at some windows that he's sure are made of gold, d'you know that one? I used to like that sort of thing,

about going and you find it's not there, and you look back home and you see that oh [L] it's [?] and that kind [.] cos you're giving off attitudes as well and that's quite a nice one I think. So, I'm trying to think if there was anything else. But he was like encouraged at school as well too, like they were very pleased that he could read when he started school. He changed his school a lot cos we were moving from room to room to room, and they were very pleased when he went into one of the schools in Manchester
10 - we lived in Macclesfield by the way for a time, it's a horrible place [L] - and they, yeah they quite sort of liked small children, by that time the emphasis had changed, so it was then OK for parents to teach their kids so -

So who do you have now then to talk about reading and writing with? Who do you share it with?

I share some of it with him. He's, as a say character right, he's very encouraging and like he's always very positive about anything I do, very approving and pleased,
20 he gives off that he's pleased, that I take an interest in such things. I remember years ago telling him [?], his name's Matthew anyway, "I think I'd like to write a story about this". I was talking about it as an excuse not to do it right, d'you know that one, and I told him the story and he said, "Why don't you, like you told me, why don't you write it?" right. [L] "It's really good". But it's still to this day not written, that particular one. It's one of the ones I'd like to write from another angle. So

it, I think I talk to him more than, yeah more than, well maybe I talk to him more than anybody anyway. And then there's the people in Commonword that I talk to, but there's nobody else really that I can say. If I told any of the neighbours they [...] I mean they think I'm a bit scatty anyway, a bit peculiar. One of them over there, with who I don't get on at all, told me - I was out looking at the sky, just looking at it - what was I doing out gawping, "You're going gawping again". [L] So I can't
10 have a gawp at the sky [L] - sort of doing odd things like that, it doesn't look good, looking at the sky [...]

Well, how did you come to chose Commonword - I mean did you chose a women's workshop deliberately ?

Sort of yes, like yes and no. Yes in the sense that [?] I think it was convenience. I'm trying to think why I didn't chose a group with men in it. I think if I'd gone there on the particular day, and I think had there been men there I'd've maybe become accustomed to that, and it would've been, I think it would've been alright, but I'm not too
20 sure about that. I wonder if, what would happen now, if say half a dozen men came into that group, if that would, I'm sure it would change things, whether it would upset things or not I don't know. I'm quite happy about it as it is, but I don't, I sometimes wonder if maybe it might be good to sort of change. I mean I feel that I could do with the practice or the what d'you call it, or if enclosed, the protected kind of setting, it is a bit protected, if I could do with that for just a bit longer. I'd like it till

I get a bit more the hang of things.

I seem to remember writing something, this is at college, and it was fairly heavily sort of criticised, and I thought about it, it was a man who criticised it as well, and like I remember thinking like he doesn't understand it - sounds very defensive - but he doesn't understand what I'm trying to get across, he expected far too much of me, and you don't get that kind of thing, like that kind of criticism. I mean I think it's good for people to criticise themselves and each other, but I think if you're going to criticise anything you should also be trying to understand what's going on in the thing, and I don't think he, this particular man, could be bothered. I mean I think that's the wrong attitude, he should've shurrup and not said anything, or maybe said that he didn't understand. But in Commonword it's like there's different, we've got different attitudes to things. I like sort of positive criticism and contributions, and I like a kind of exactness, or even if it isn't exactness, I like aiming towards that, like that's the goal, even if I don't always get there, to being as precise as I can without being too fussy. Cos I mean it's just trying, I don't want to take it that seriously [L] yeah.

If you had to say in a sentence why you write, d'you think you could do it? Can you explain it that easy? Is it one of those meaning of life questions?

Yes, and there's something in it. I think given that I

know the mechanics of writing, like I can spell and write,
it's a way of - oh God this is terrible - it's a way of
being human, right. It's like communicating, well it is a
form of communicating. I think everybody's got something.
I don't, I suspect already writing may not be my thing,
but it's something to be doing. I mean I like knitting as
it happens, I never follow a pattern, I sort of make up my
own. I like drawing. And it's a way of expressing, it's a
way of sort of expressing yourself and the things around
10 you, describing them. And I certainly like listening to
other people, you notice when I'm chatting and hearing
them, their accounts of their lives and themselves, and
this is a way of setting that down for myself, it's like
giving an account. That isn't in one sentence. You ask the
impossible!

*I know! [L] I couldn't've put it that succinctly, I don't
think, myself. It's alright for me, I'm just asking the
questions. [L]*

20 There's an element of, I was trying to get away from
therapy, as well, there's an element of that in it as
well, for me anyway. It might not be true of all people,
but maybe if people started writing expressively earlier
maybe they mightn't get into the bloody mess that I, you
know the sort of confusion I was trying to express sort of
earlier that happened. Like part of that was sort of [.]
there's a word that I'm very fond of now thinking about
it, called inchoate, come across it? There's a dictionary
up there but I'm not going to get it down. [L] I think

what it means - it's only a little dictionary - I think it's that thing that certainly children experience before they've got language, and you can experience it as an adult or growing up anyway before you've got the right word for the event, and you don't know what's happening, you're sort of, you can't easily describe it. And I think that state is a very important state for a lot of people, and I'm sure a lot of people go through it. I did, I remember, even when I was, like I'd left childhood, some
10 of my childhood, a long way behind. But there's certain sort of areas where words can't, you can't get the words for the thing if it's new, sort of a new experience, you know, so I think there's sort of elements of that right. I'm sure when you come to hear this it'll all be just like not properly thought out things but -

Well, it's hard to do. [.....]

Right. So I'm trying to be honest right. [L] I'm being as honest as I can be, but you're never sufficiently sort of self-critical. D'you know what I mean, you never -

20 *Well sometimes you can be too self-critical.*

Yeah. You can never be sort of exactly on the dot. Cos one of the things I was going to do was write out a list of books, and it was when I thought about the Catechism I just fell about. [L] But I think it's a very important little document you see, we had to learn it off by heart. [.....] Mind you I used to - d'you know the prayer called the Confetior, "I believe in God" (5), well I used to modify that because I was, I used to have doubts you see,

so I modified that and I used to feel terribly guilty cos I wasn't saying the whole prayer. There was a bit at the end I didn't, I couldn't believe, [L] can't remember what it is now, sort of [?] say it all off from the beginning and come to the bit where I used to change it. Anyway -

Is there anything else, while the tape's still running, is there anything else that you think's important, that I haven't actually asked you about?

[P] It's actually better when you've got a question, d'you
10 know what I mean, it's easier, but I appreciate the chance
[.....] Big silence now. [L] [.....] I just can't think - as soon as you go out the door I'll think about it. It's very, very difficult. [P] Well I think it's some kind of realisation, I think we've covered this in some way, as to do with story telling, because I used to have the notion, I'd forgotten about the little bits of writing I did as a child, completely forgot about them and that I enjoyed them, that I liked them. I didn't feel, although I was a bit hidden about them, there was something unselfconscious
20 about it. I mean unstriving about it as well. But it's also to do with the thing that I read books about theory, have I said that, and I sort of like them, and I'd've said at one level I'm not interested in stories, and what's the whole point of stories right, life is to be lived and so on, and then I remember realising that we're telling each other stories all the time, d'you know what I mean? Even if it's just what you did that morning, it's put in a form of a story. Like you're telling, it's all, like life is, I

don't mean life is a fiction, nothing as tricky as that, but that there is a lot of story telling going on. I think that that's the only other bit for me but maybe we've covered that and I've forgotten it.

III Notes

1) Doreen means here that she is feeling inhibited by the presence of the tape recorder.

2) She indicates the size of the fireplace as half the width of the room we are in.

3) Roman Catholic schools used to collect money for overseas missionaries by calling the collection "pennies for black babies".

4) This refers to the idea of anything other than perfection not being good enough, not a triumph in its own right, but second rate.

5) The Roman Catholic prayer which professes faith in the Church's basic dogma.

Appendix 4: Interview 4: Marsha

I Introduction

I interviewed Marsha in the autumn of 1989, in her home which she shares with her partner and her partner's young daughter. I was given Marsha's work phone number by Commonword and had previously met her one lunchtime to explain my project and ask if she would allow me to interview her. The interview took just under an hour and a half to complete.

II Transcript

When you were young, did your parents do much reading? Do you remember them being readers?

What, when I was young?

Yeah.

Well the only thing - my dad hasn't really changed, the only thing that he ever read and still does now is the newspaper, I mean that he reads every day. That's the only thing I ever saw him reading.

Which one was it?

10 The Sun. [L] The Sun during the week and The Sunday Mirror
on a Sunday cos The Sun didn't make a, you know, Sunday
paper in those, "in those days". I think occasionally he
would sort of read other things which I don't really have
any recollection of, which just shows how rare it was. My
mum on the other hand did do quite a bit of reading I mean
but she was the sort of person who'd just read in bed, or
I mean occasionally just during the day if she had a bit
of spare time. I mean I don't recall that they were you
know neither of them are really avid readers I wouldn't
20 say.

Did you have books around the house though, with your mum
reading them?

Well I remember we didn't sort of have shelves or anything
like this (1) around the house, but I remember that we did
have this huge pile of books that just lived in a big bag

underneath the sort of hot water system in my mum's bedroom, which I used to sort of delve through now and then but that's about it.

What about magazines? Were there any magazines around?

No we just, I don't know, we just didn't seem to be that sort of family. I wasn't really bothered with magazines. I mean I remember having comics and stuff like that but you know most of the stuff that I read I think was books that I actually got from school. And they turned out to be more
10 interesting.

Did your parents ever read to you though when you were little?

God what a question! Because I don't remember it, I think they probably didn't. I mean I remember the first book I ever had was just a little book of fairytales, and I mean I only ever remember reading that to myself so I assume that you know, most of the reading that I actually did I just picked up myself really, you know, because I'd started school as well.

20 What about story telling? Do you remember doing that?

No, no, not at all. It depends, well I think it depends on what exactly you mean by story telling.

Well I mean anything, like it doesn't have to be fairy-stories, things about family tales, or stuff about when they were younger or [...]

Oh God yeah. My mum's a great person for that sort of

thing. I mean on the other hand like there's my dad who is - I mean I think I'm like him in a lot of ways - who doesn't really talk an awful lot anyway ever, and he never, ever talks about his family like back home in Jamaica or you know, family in America or anything you know, unless you specifically ask him and then it's you know it's just like a one line answer. You know you can't sort of have a discussion or anything. But my mum is a great you know a real great character in terms of telling
10 stories and you know if you just say, "Oh tell me about the time when", she'll go on, she could probably go on for hours and is a really interesting person to listen to. So yeah, I mean she's got lots of interesting stories, but I mean I think it's also because she is a lot, lot older than I am and so life was very, very different when she was young, and you know just because when she was a child you didn't have TVs, and I don't think they had a radio either at first or anything like that, so you know the way you entertain yourself is by talking, and I think probably
20 she's got a lot of that from there as well.

So I mean d'you remember as a kid doing the, "Tell me about the time when", or is that as an older person you got more interested in it?

I think that's something that has happened as I've got older not so much when I was small. Although you know she has like big things that have happened in her life that she has told us about and which you know, which have sort of stayed with me and which I think she probably told us

about when I was quite small.

So what about when you went to school then, I mean, what kind of a school was it? What was it like?

When I, well let me just say this first of all, [L] actually it isn't at all funny, the place that I live in that I lived in Middleton, well Rhodes is a tiny little village - I mean people who live there call it a village, but it isn't a village in the sense that it's in the middle of the country, but it is on the edge of a small
10 town, and in which there are very few Black people and there still are. And when you know, when I was living there my family was the only Black family in the whole town I think, not just in the village. I mean that is changing slowly now, though I can't imagine why Black people would want to move into that area. So when I went to school I mean the situation was very much the same, although you know, the school wasn't in that town it was outside of it, but the area was basically an all white area. So I mean like the only other Black people at school
20 were my sisters who were, you know, just a little bit older than I was. So I mean I remember the first day at school which was absolutely awful, and I think that that is probably a lot to do with the fact that you know, as a Black child you become very self-conscious once you start, you know hitting society and finding out what racism's all about. But I mean eventually when I settled down I think I was quite happy at school because I don't know, I think probably because the things we did there I enjoyed doing.

So what were your favourite bits and your least favourite bits then?

Well when I was very small I think I just enjoyed everything, you know because I just enjoyed playing around and being with other children I think. As I got older I think I preferred things, I think English was my favourite subject and I liked sports, and as I got older still I think the things I really didn't like were things like physics and chemistry, and as I got older still I didn't
10 like school at all [L] you know. I think that's what most people go through.

So which secondary school was it you went to?

A school in Middleton called St. Dominic [?] which was just a normal Roman Catholic secondary school.

So what was that like, what was your experience there like?

Well I'd say on the whole I quite enjoyed it. I mean I think having been brought up as a Catholic you, there are certain things that you just take for granted, and it's
20 only when you sort of start mixing in the real world that you realise how sort of oppressed you've been and how religion, how the negative aspects of religion, have you know, had that same negative influence on the way that you think, and the way that you feel, and just the way that you operate as a human being. So I mean yeah, I did like school, but [.] and I think I started off being very good, and I think that I could've been a brilliant student, but I didn't. [L] I don't know why, but I just started you

know, I just decided I wasn't really bothered about it and stopped doing anything. I used to work really hard when I first started and regularly came top of the class but after a couple of years I just started messing around the whole time. I didn't do any work. I did homework but I didn't, fr'instance I didn't study at all for my final year "O" Levels and I was very surprised that I came out with anything at all when you know when I look back - who knows why?

10 So were the teachers encouraging then, when you were doing well?

I think probably not. I mean I don't recall that you know, they were especially encouraging except where sports are concerned. But I mean any Black child who shows the slightest bit of interest in sport is gonna be really encouraged, and I mean that is the only area really in which I feel I was really encouraged, especially even in the days before I reached secondary school. Virtually as far back as I can remember, you know I was, I just always
20 remember doing a lot of running. And like when I was seven or eight at school I was even, you know, allowed to miss classes and stuff so I could run round the yard and stuff like that and which is all very nice, you know, in terms of, "Oh great I've got off this lesson", but I don't think that's the correct way to go about things.

What about your English, cos you were saying you were good at English, I mean did you remember being encouraged with

that or was that just ignored?

No, I don't think that I was particularly encouraged, but then I don't think that anybody was, and I think that's really to do with the way that schools operate and the way that teachers work. I don't feel that they have, I mean that most teachers that is, don't really have any genuine interest in the job that they're doing or in the children, you know they're just sort of there to do a job, and you know, that's really where it ends which is sad but you
10 now, that is the way the world goes.

Do you remember any books that you had to read when you were at school?

Actually there was one book that was a brilliant book, and I read it when I was about fourteen and it was called The Long Walk by, I can't remember who it was by, although I've since ordered the book from Grassroots (2) and I'm not sure that it will still be in print, but it was by someone a Russian writer and I thought that was a brilliant book. Other than that, no I don't really recall any.
20 Oh yeah, I read something of, what's it called, Of Mice and Men I remember that. John Steinbeck. I think everyone reads that book. [L]

What about reading for pleasure, when you were at school did you do much reading outside, that you didn't have to? Yeah I'm sure I did. I mean I don't remember specifically doing a lot, but I'm sure that I must have because you know, I do sort of remember the odd occasion where [P] I

remember my brothers used to say - cos they again were much older than me - I'd be sort of sitting reading in the evening and they'd say, "You're gonna need glasses before you're 21". [L] That I do remember.

What about comics, you mentioned comics before, what did you, which ones did you get?

I don't think, well I know that I didn't get comics regularly. I didn't get them every week or anything like that. It was probably just sometimes if I was out shopping
10 with my mum and I'd say, "Oh can I have that comic?", then she'd probably buy it. I think stuff like the Beano I used to read. I can't really remember anything else.

But not little girly types?

No I didn't go for those, I mean I remember my sister used to get that Twinkle, [L] which wasn't really my cup of tea. [L]

What about Black literature, I mean was it around then?
Was there any way, cos you like you were living in a very white environment, was that the same for the reading
20 stuff, was it a white world reflected in it?

I think it definitely was. I mean I don't have any [.] there was, in fact there was one book that was in this heap of books that my mum had, and that had to be a religious book, but it was about this, in fact it was the only Black saint I've ever heard of right, called St. Martin, and it was just a book about his life story. That's the only book that I remember. [P] And you know I

think that is a lot to do with as you mention the fact that I was living in an all-white environment, but also because of the experience and just the life that my mum and dad have had which isn't at all - I mean the idea about identifying strongly as a Black person just doesn't seem to be within their sort of realm of experience. Therefore I think it, you know, actually coming to identify yourself as, for me being something which is [P] Oh God something which I've had to find for myself and
10 like just go through myself, and not have any support or anything like that. I mean even today I think my mum finds it really hard to refer to Black people as "Black" and I mean it's like she's from a totally different time you know, and I can't really communicate with her, or she with me.

What about writing at the school, can you remember what kinds of writing you had to do?

[P] Well I know I had to do essays, I mean and all sorts of things, but I can't remember anything in particular. I
20 do remember once though when we had to write a poem and I just I wrote this poem, which just goes to show right, how religion, God, how religion influences you. But I just went away and got the Bible, well a copy of the Bible and that, cos I decided I wanted to write a poem about Samson and Delilah, which is a very interesting story. So I just wrote a poem about that and I was really pleased because the teacher gave me ten out of ten, and I think that was, I mean it wasn't the first time I'd get ten out of ten,

but I didn't think the poem was that good really, you know
[L] so I was quite pleased with that but -

How old were you then? Can you remember?

Well I was in junior two so that means I'd be 12 or 13, I guess. I think as well sometimes we were asked to sort of write about what we did while we were on holiday, you know at the end of the school holidays, which I found totally boring because I never did anything in particular, or anything special, except just you know play around.

10 What about outside school, did you ever write for pleasure, like did you ever write a poem not when you were told to?

[P] I don't think I ever wrote poetry. No, not as such. I'm sure I used to write bits and pieces of things and just keep them, and I know I used to keep a diary as well. Well I kept a diary for two years and then I just threw it all away. And I thought it was a real shame cos I thought in later years that I really wished that I'd kept them. But I just sort of, one day I felt really paranoid and I
20 thought, God, someone might find this when I die. [L] So that was a shame. Plus the other thing is that I think I kept a lot of, I kept all my school books and everything you know for years and then I just chucked them all out, and I really wish I hadn't done that you know, certainly not English books, I mean maths it's neither here nor there, but you know just to see the sort of things that I was writing about.

What about your brothers and sisters or your friends, d'you remember them being big readers or writers at all? Not at all, no. I mean as far as my brothers and sisters go, the only time I ever saw them, you know, putting pen to paper was, well my sister was really into art so she did a lot of drawings and stuff at home, and my other sister and two brothers, I mean the only time I saw them put pen to paper was if they were doing homework for school or college or something, but other than that not at
10 all really, no. Oh yeah, I remember actually my sister did this competition once in the local paper and I think it was just like writing a little piece on what you thought happiness meant, something like that. I think you know, I think she won something. I don't think she won the competition outright but you know she got something. My mum cut that out and I think she, I think my mum's still got that actually, the little cutting somewhere.

And your friends weren't particularly into it all either? No, not at all. Not that I was aware of anyway.

20 So were you into reading magazines more so as you got older? Did you ever go in for you know, like the older girls' magazines?

No, I didn't really bother with those. I mean I knew that my sisters did but I just wasn't ever a person who was that interested in magazines. If I was going to read something I wanted something that I could get into so that meant reading a book. I mean I do remember as I got older

I started going to the library and that was something again that I just sort of introduced myself to. I, you know, just decided that I'd go and join and have a look, so I used to get books out then and just read things.

Well what about reading now - well I take it you do a lot more?

I do. Well I don't do an awful lot of reading now - that is simply because I haven't got the time and I think I'm the sort of person, well probably everyone's like this, 10 but I've got to be, even if I have got the time I've got to be in the mood as well. But yeah, I mean I've decided now that I can't buy any more books, because I've bought so many and you know, loads of which I haven't read and I'll probably never read them unless you know, I don't know, I live to be a very old woman. [L]

So what kind of stuff were you into buying?

I can't sort of say I buy a particular type of book because I don't. But I mean I did, when I left the shop I just did this massive swoop because you know, whilst I was 20 there I was allowed to get a third off books right. I just bought a load. So I mean the sort of stuff I bought was I mean mainly Black writers, some poetry books, a few novels, just you know ordinary novels, and that's more or less it. Yeah, I think I find it really hard though to say I like this type of book and I don't like that, because you know, sometimes you might just pick up a book and it's you know, might not be fiction, but it's something that

you've never read anything about before and you just read it because it's interesting. I like biographies as well.

So whose, are there any that stick out in your mind particularly that you've read [...] ?

[P] Apparently not, no. [L] I mean I was reading, actually I was reading Audre Lorde's The Cancer Journals which I thought was a really good book and - although I wouldn't agree that you know someone, I think it was Adrienne Rich who said that every woman should read it, I'm not sure
10 about that. I mean, yeah if she wants to. But it's a good book though and you know, it's the sort of thing that just raises all sorts of issues that you haven't really thought about before, and might not think about. Plus I like Alice Walker's stuff right, but I think she's in some respects she's a very backward thinking person. Cos I think she's really homophobic for one thing, and I think she's got a bit of a thing about Black men which I'm not, I haven't really figured it out yet, so I can't really say anything more on it [L] but when I figure it out I'll let you know.
20 [L] If I figure it out.

What about the homophobic aspect, I mean what makes you - Of Alice Walker? Oh is this going down in print? [L] There's this - actually I'm not sure which book it is in now, she's got [P] oh no I'll never find anything there. (3) Anyway [P] - no, it isn't Alice Walker I mean, it's Maya Angelou. That's who I'm on about. Yeah. It's either in the first or second of those autobiographical type

books that she's written and there's a section, I mean I can't remember it specifically to be able to tell you about it, but it's just this bit, this scene where there's two lesbians in a bar or something like that and it's just the way that the whole thing is depicted and, oh I really can't remember it exactly but -

It's left you with that kind of feeling.

Yeah definitely, definitely. Which I think is a shame but you know everybody can't be perfect. [L]

- 10 *It's a problem sometimes when you're reading a biography isn't it - you want the person to be absolutely wonderful. Well, the thing is, what pisses me off is the fact that a lot of people who read her stuff will think, and do think, that you know, she's a really brilliant person and I don't really like the way that Black people, Black women especially are sort of put on pedestals. And you know, it's like you can't say or do anything wrong, and you know, it just drives me mad cos it makes you know, like people've done it to me and it makes me feel like you can't function*
- 20 *as a normal human being.*

So are there any other biographies [...]?

[P] There isn't anything that comes to mind, no.

Right how about novels, are there any that you particularly enjoyed?

I'm sure there are. [P] In terms of the [...] well I tend to judge, well judge isn't the right word, but I tend to sort

of decide about novels in terms of how much they actually move me, and I think the first one that really did was The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath. And you know it was [...] I think I read that when I was about 14 or 15 and I just remember being, oh God I can't even describe the feeling, I was just really stunned I think by it. It was like, it was just wierd. I mean that I can only compare it, and I only had that feeling once before, and that was when I saw a film which was I don't know, quite a few years ago, yeah
10 it must be I don't know how many then, years ago. Anyway the film was called The Rose, with Bette Midler, and that was the same, that did the same sort of thing to me, seeing that film. So that's one book. [P] I think another one, but mainly because of the sort of topic, I don't know what the book's called but it was written by a man and a woman who were married to each other, and it was written about their daughter who had cancer and who died of cancer, I think she died when she was about 14 or something, and I think that just really moved me really because
20 of the way it was written, and just the way that they'd actually dealt with death and you know like the knowledge that someone very close to you is going to die, you don't know when but they're gonna die. [P] Don't know what else.

Right what about poetry? Is there a particular poet that you're into?

There isn't, there definitely isn't a particular poet that I'm into, not at all. I mean I remember once I enrolled on this course with the, I think it was with the London

School of Journalism and it was a correspondence course in poetry and I thought God, what a waste of time that was. [L] Cos I think it cost about 30 odd pound it was, I don't know how long it was, but I did you know, I sort of did the first exercise and sent the stuff in, and they sent it back to me with all these totally useless remarks on it and, so I didn't even bother going any further with it because it was a total waste of time and you know, effort and everything. But I remember at that time one of the
10 comments they made was that I should try reading more classical poetry [L] and I thought bloody hell. But you know what's the point if you find it really boring or whatever. But you know, now I do like to read just all sorts of stuff really. But you know, I mean at the end of the day, in terms of what is easier to read and understand and which can really speak more directly to people because it's you know written today not you know 200 years ago, I prefer that sort of stuff.

[?] you can name -

20 Can I name names?

Yeah, point an incriminating finger. [L]

Well, I'd have to say Lemn Sissay as one person definitely, not because he's in Manchester or anything like that, but I mean reading his poetry right, or listening to it or seeing him perform, it's just a really interesting experience, because I know that he has had an experience of life which is very much like my own and it's, in some ways it's like he's inside my head, you see, he's just

saying the same things that I would say if I could say them that way. And I think that's for me that is important in poetry - it's no good if someone is you know, like going on about unrequited love and all this business because I mean it [L] it's OK if you can you know, if you've got the privilege to just sort of think and exist on that level, but I mean you know, I haven't. And you know I prefer something which can speak more directly to me. [P] I can't really name anyone else.

10 What about when you were a kid, did you have a particular favourite story? I mean you mentioned a book of fairy stories, how did you interact with those?

[L] Well it wasn't, I mean it wasn't like the sort of fairy tale books that you can get today where you know, you get all sorts of different people portrayed in all kinds of different ways. It was I mean it was just like a fairy tale book with stuff like Rapunzel in. I think that's probably the story that I remember best and, oh Snow White has got to be there I reckon. [L] I mean I'm

20 not really sure exactly what I made of them at the time, but I must have enjoyed them to have you know kept the book so long. [P] I think maybe [.] I mean it was a birthday present from my brother, I remember that, and I think maybe he used to sit and read to me, because I probably got it at a time when I couldn't read but was just sort of learning to probably. Cos I think I remember more looking at the pictures than actually you know, grappling with the words.

So are there any images that have stayed with you from it?
From that book? Well there are images yeah, but I mean the
question is, is it, you know is it just like me looking
back now with different eyes, because you know obviously
there aren't any Black characters in the book, and they've
all got happy endings and you know, I am a person who
doesn't really think that it is possible in this life to
be you know "happy". It doesn't really - I don't think
that word has any real meaning for me you know, in reality
10 and so I don't know. I mean I guess it's just like a way
of escaping but I don't know I don't know whether I ever,
ever truly escaped to that place where you know everyone
is white and -

Has long blonde hair.

*So, I mean, you brought up the point about escapism do you
read to escape? I mean is that something you do as an
adult or -*

I don't think I do really, no. I mean I think I just read
to - because I enjoy it. It also can sort of give you
20 ideas about various things, and I mean like sometimes I
read a book and think wow that's a brilliant phrase and go
and write it down, and other times I don't. [L] I mean
it's just interesting as well at looking at different sort
of different ways of life too, and what you can say with
words.

*So you're interested in the language as you're reading as
much as the story or [...]*

Yeah I mean not always you know, it just depends on what it is that I'm reading. Like for instance at the moment I'm reading this book about it's called The Words To Say It and it's the life story of, God how to express, it's the life story of a woman who was, well she is a white, upper-class woman who came also from a Catholic background and I think it's - it sort of starts where she's in a real state, you know mentally in a bad way, and it's really about the story of how she dealt with it. So I mean I'm
10 not - the things is I'm sort of interested in mental illness and that sort of thing, so when I'm reading that I'm not really so much looking at the language that she's using, cos I don't think that is that important. It's not as important as the actual issues that she's dealing with.

So it depends on the book and the mood you're in and all kinds of things, what you're actually looking at?

Yeah, yeah. I guess it does.

Now you mentioned a film before, The Rose. Was that like a favourite film you'd say or just one that had a powerful-
20 I'd say it's just one that had a powerful effect on me, definite. I mean I don't really have all this favourites business in anything, except food. [L] But yeah, I think that was one -

Why do you think it had such a powerful effect though?

[P] I honestly don't know. I mean it was, I felt that it was very real. But I think, I don't know, I think the

story it was telling was a very sad one as well, which is what life is really like I think. So I mean that may just be it, the fact that I felt you know, this is what life is really like. But I just remember afterwards, cos I think it finished about one o'clock in the morning when I watched it, I just watched it on TV, and so I went up to bed, but it was like I couldn't get in bed and go to sleep, I needed to do something, but you know what can you do at one o'clock in the morning - cos I was living at my
10 parents house at the time so I didn't have any means of going and doing anything, and I didn't know what I wanted to do anyway. But I mean it was just an incredible experience. I don't know why. But I think Bette Midler's just a brilliant actress anyway, although I don't you know I don't think she's, any character that she's played before or since have sort of equalled that performance.

Are there any other films that have stayed in your mind?

[P] God. [P] Well I remember seeing Midnight Express and I thought yeah, that was a good film and one that I would
20 like to see again. I think I saw that when I was about 15 or something. Oh I can't have no, I must've been about 18, I think it's an X certificate and I definitely wouldn't've got in at 15. [L] Yeah, quite recently as well at the Cornerhouse I saw Torch Song Trilogy which I thought was a good film. Other than that, no. I'm not really that much of a film person you know, like a lot of people go and see loads of different films, but I mean I just tend to you know, look and see if there's anything I want to go and

see and if I fancy it I'll go, but it has got to be something I want to see not just any old thing.

So what kind, I mean is there a particular kind of film or is it like with the books, it's quite a wide range that you look at?

Yeah, I think it is probably quite a wide range.

What about telly, do you watch much telly?

No I don't.

Did you when you were younger?

10 Probably. [L] I mean at the moment it's time really, you know with this job and various other commitments, I don't have, I don't really spend that much time in the house. But you know if I've got a couple of hours or an evening free then you know, sometimes you're too knackered to do anything else, so you just switch the TV on. So I don't there isn't anything that I particularly watch regularly, although you know from time to time I'll follow Brookside or Eastenders and then you know, just sort of leave it.

[L] I mean it's all the same thing going on anyway really
20 so [L] you don't really miss that much. I don't, no I don't really sort of go in for anything regularly.

Well in all this has there ever been a character in any of the books or films or anything that you've really found that you've empathised with? Any particular characters that might have stuck in your mind?

[P] I don't think so. I mean there probably is but there

isn't one that sort of sticks out.

No sort of heros or heroines?

Oh definitely none of those no. [L]

You didn't go in for them [...]

No, not at all, no.

What about re-reading, do you ever re-read things?

What, books?

Yeah, or does it tend to be, once it's done it's done?

It tends to be once I've read it that's it. You know
10 unless, I mean sometimes I look back at you know, as I was
saying before, if I see a phrase or you know a paragraph
that I think is really interesting, or you know really
well written or something like that, then I'll sort of
turn the corner over and I might come back to that, but
you know I don't really go for re-reading whole books. It
takes too long. [L] I know it's a problem that I don't
feel that I can read fast enough. It takes me too long to
read things and you know, I think I'd rather read someth-
ing new than something that I'd already read.

20 So when did you start writing then?

That is a question that has no answer, because I mean I
think probably that I started writing as soon as I learnt
how to write you know, although I don't really have any
[P] I don't have very many specific memories of writing
things. But, I don't know, I just think I'm a writing sort
of person and feel that that's the way that things have
always been. So you know, there isn't, I can't really say,

I can't put a date on things.

Well how about your involvement in writers' groups, I mean that must've been a change to join you know to actually be a "joiner" of a group as well.

Well the group that I've had, well the only group really that I've had any proper involvement in is what is now Identity group, and I mean I don't really feel that, as I said before, that that group could give me anything that I actually want. I mean it probably could, but it's just
10 like dynamics and the way groups work, or for me the way that group was working at the time, which meant that you know, I didn't really feel that I was getting anything out of it so -

What about your reason for joining in the first place, I mean you must've thought you would get something from it? Yeah, cos I thought it would help me to you know better criticise my own work, and just really to help me to become a better writer. And also I hoped that it would help me in terms of developing skills in performance
20 poetry but the way - you see I don't think there was any sort of space for performance poetry to actually come through. And I mean I'm not really sure how best a group can work in terms of those things, but you know as far as I'm concerned that group wasn't doing it for me.

What about the other things though, you know, like the criticism and that, did it help with the other things you

were wanting?

Well yeah, I mean it helped in the sense that you're getting someone else's opinion, and that everyone looks at different things in different ways and so that you know, the chances are that people will see things that you haven't been able to see yourself. So yeah, that is and was useful. Plus I mean it was a good experience to be able to be in a group where you knew that the people that were there could understand what it was that you were
10 saying. Cos sometimes I've done readings and it's been virtually an all-white audience who [...] and I, like a lot of the, I think, like most of the things that I write about are really, it's just really about racism and you know my experience in the world as a Black person, and some of these performances I feel that I end up feeling a bit bad about really, because people aren't really hearing what it is that I'm saying. And you know if a Black person talks about racism it's like, to a white person it's like you're trying to make them feel guilty or they will go
20 away feeling guilty and that is, you know there's no point in that, because it's just negative really and you wanna sort of go forward not backwards and - but I have decided that you know, I just I write poetry for me really you know, first and foremost. So if people, I feel that if people can't handle what it is that I'm saying then you know, then they have to stop listening.

Was there ever a point when you thought it might stop you writing though?

Not at all, no, because I feel it is, I mean it is a useful exercise even just to write poetry and not to perform it or you know, never ever to let anyone else read it, because I think it tells me a lot about myself and I can look back at stuff that I've written years ago and I think yeah, yeah I can see how I've sort of moved on from there, and I can sort of just remember about how I actually felt at that time.

So it's almost like a, fulfilling the function of a diary,
10 in that sense isn't it?

Yeah, it is in a way, yeah.

Do you have like a division between the writing that you'll show to other people and the writing that you don't?

No I don't. I mean I you know, I have opinions about which I'd prefer people not to see because I just don't think they're worth anything, but I mean that's usually not proved to be the case. You know in reality people will never say, "Oh I think that's a load of crap that", or
20 anything like that. [L] They might say, like sometimes if it can be really confused then they might say you know, "I haven't got a clue what it is saying" or "It doesn't sort of mean anything to me, the words as they are put", but I think it's always useful, really a useful exercise to let other people hear it or to let other people read it.

So you haven't got like a secret stock of -

Not at all, no.

Did you ever do that or were you always quite open about your writing?

Well you know I wasn't, no I wasn't always quite open. I mean it used to be the case that everything I wrote I didn't want anyone to ever see or hear but - so I'm not really sure how that changed over. I remember actually a time when I was living at my mum's house that I let her read some of my poems and she said they were good right,
10 and I mean that was good for me because you know, it was someone that meant a lot to me and who I respected, telling me that she thought something I'd done was good, and so that you know that just gave me more confidence. But I mean I think whatever the case you know, whatever had happened, that I would carry on writing.

So is it all poetry that you write or do you ever write stories or -

It is I'd say 99.9% of the time it's poetry. Mainly because I find it easier to write and I find that I think
20 poetry's more hard hitting than stories. I mean it's a different like a whole different ball game really. I have occasionally written little stories. I mean I tend to, cos I do tend to have weird dreams which I write down, and you know I just I write them down because they're interesting, but also because I think you could probably get something out of that. [L] But you know I haven't really done anything with them yet although I am interested in, this

isn't the dreams but I'm quite interested in biographies generally, and I've decided that I'm gonna write my mum's life story, so that will probably be the first you know, the first thing that I've written which is long and which isn't poetry.

Have you discussed that with her?

Yeah I have.

How did she feel about it?

Well she's quite willing to do it. I mean I think she was
10 on the one hand a bit put out that anyone would want to write about her life, you know like, "God, I've had such a boring life", or you know run of the mill activities, and on the other hand I think you know, she was kind of milling over in her mind what would it be like for people to read about what I've done in my life you know, who would sort of want to read it. But I mean I look at it like some of the things she has been through I think it would be such a shame if, you know, it wasn't written down. Cos like my gran died quite well fairly recently and
20 she is another person, because I think she was about 90 right, and you know some of the experiences that she had-unbelievable. [L] And you know, I just think it's a great shame that people like that, who I call great people, can live and die and then you know, and that's the end of it. Yeah, I think it's a great shame. But I mean I think that's happened, and still does happen, a lot as far as working-class people are concerned and you know, it can't go on.

How are you going to go about doing it? I mean are you going to tape her talking or -

That's what I was planning because it isn't, you know as I said before she is a person who can you know, can talk and talk and talk. You know you could just say, tell me what it was like when you were at school or tell me about certain incidents or you know something like that, and I think she could just talk and talk, and I don't think it would be very difficult in terms of you know, getting
10 information from her. I think that's what one of the things that she's best at. [L]

So with the other stuff how've you decided what's gonna be a story and what's gonna be a poem?

[P] Well I've written very few, very, very, very few stories but -

They must've felt like they were gonna be a story rather than a poem.

Yeah, the thing is I've just I mean with stories it tends to be an idea like something, I think about something and
20 I think, yeah that could be a little story or a little piece of prose or something. But I mean where poems are concerned, it tends to be things that have happened you know, real life, and therefore I mean, I don't know, just more interesting and, as I said, more hard hitting, to be written as a poem. So it isn't any great decision, I think it's quite clear cut for me.

How have other people reacted to you being a writer as

much as to your writing, like family and friends and that? Are they supportive generally or do they giggle at you or what?

I think, well I think firstly with my family that, I don't think they're surprised, because I mean I'm the only one of our family that went to university and I think they sort of see me as you know, like a bookworm type really. Although you know I'm not, I don't think, [L] but I think you know, I think they feel quite proud in a way because
10 it is like an achievement and it's a good thing to be. Friends, well I tend, you know, I don't, I tend not to tell people about it because, I don't know I mean it's just something that I do and that I enjoy, and you know if they ask me about it sure I'll talk but it isn't something that I'll sort of be very out going about. But I don't you know, I haven't sort of found that people will be negative about it. I think they tend usually to be a bit surprised which - I mean I think that's because people have very set ideas about what a writer is like and you know -

20 D'you think those ideas influenced you?

What the ideas about what a writer should be like?

Yeah, cos I mean I always imagined a middle-aged, white middle-class man in a big house sat at a desk, so I find it hard to think of me as a writer, even though I write. I mean that -

[P] I think that is something that I've only thought about you know while I have been a writer. I don't really think it's something that I have had any problem with because, I

mean sometimes I have to sort of, it's like just [P] oh I don't know it's like I just have to - I mean I think that I am me and that's it really, you know this is what I am and this is all there is and I don't know, I mean anyone, I think anybody can be a writer if they want to be. I mean the question of actually getting things published and that sort of thing is another issue altogether. But I think that anyone can be a writer.

10 So d'you have sort of particular ambitions for your writing?

Yeah, I want to be rich and famous. [L] I think, yeah I have. I mean I'd like to publish a book of my poetry but God knows if that would ever happen. And I'd also like to do work on biographies, cos that is something which as I said, which I find really interesting, and an area which has been sadly neglected. But I don't want to get into this sort of you know, like the Maya Angelou business. I don't want to get into that, cos I think you know that is a problem for Black women writers generally who - it's
20 like, I mean like I feel that sometimes you can sort [...] it's like you reach a position where you could write something which is really badly written, which is boring, and you know, it could be about any old rubbish and you'd get it published. And you know and then as soon as it's in print you know, all the critics are saying it's the most wonderful thing and you know, I don't really like that at all. I'm not sure how you can actually get away from that but I just don't like the idea of it at all.

D'you have a particular audience in mind when you write or is it for you first?

[P] Well I think it's for me first, right, certainly where poetry is concerned and you know if, although if I'm doing a reading I will kind of tailor the poems that I chose, depending on you know who's out there. Cos it's you know it's a bit of a waste of time if you feel like you're sort of banging your head against a wall [L] all night, you know people just aren't hearing what it is that you're
10 saying. So in terms of stuff that I might write in the future like biographies and stuff, I think that is, I'd just be writing that for anyone who is interested. I mean it's difficult because I haven't done it yet. Or, you know, I'm not in the process of doing it but I'm sure those are, that is a question that I'll have to think about as I'm putting it together.

So it's not particularly influenced the style of poetry that you've chosen?

No, no and I think all that has influenced me in terms of
20 how I write is just the fact that there's a great white monster out there, I think that's it really, which is British society.

So in a sense as well as being, like racism being a negative influence on your life, it's also been a positive influence in terms of being an impetus to your writing.

Yeah, I guess you could say that, yeah.

I mean I know that it sounds awful saying that racism is

positive, I don't mean it like that, but I mean it sounds like it's provided the flashpoint if you like, that -
Yeah. I think it's just a shame I can't say

CHANGE OF TAPE

Right what about models, I mean have you ever consciously had a model, a literary model that you thought, I'd like to write like that? I mean obviously not Wordsworth. [L]
Maybe it is. [L]

The only model that I ever had, I mean that I find that a
10 lot of singers produce really brilliant lyrics, which I regard as poetry really because if you just sit and listen to it, it is an amazing experience, and the only, I mean that really is the only person that I've, the only sort of person that I've modelled and that is, the person that I'm talking about is Patti Smith right, and I just remember thinking you know if I could write like anybody I'd write words like her songs because they're just absolutely amazing. Yeah. I mean I sometimes I wonder why it is that
20 it is songs that they've written and not poetry because, well you know, as I said, I think it is poetry anyway but it's just been put across a different way if it's gonna be in music, with music.

So what kinds of music are you into then apart from Patti Smith?

Well actually I don't listen to very much Patti Smith these days.

It's just a phase you went through. [L]

I guess it was, yeah. I mean I still would say the same thing about if I could write like anyone it would be words like those. I like Prince, and he is another person, cos not only is he a brilliant musician in that he can play all sorts of things and does, but his words are often you know very poetic. I don't think he's in the same league as Patti Smith [....] I like Talking Heads. [P] I like all types of reggae music but I think, like I wasn't
10 brought up with any Black music at all except, yeah, the Jackson Five and that I do remember, but I think that's why my musical taste is as it is, you know in terms of the sort of stuff that I have been listening to for years, ever since you know, there was a radio and a TV switched on near me you know, most of the stuff that I've been exposed to has been like you know, European type music and sounds. So you know I think that's why it is that I go for that sort of stuff mainly, and it's really only in recent years that I've been more exposed to Black music.

20 *Has that been a conscious thing to start listening -*
Definitely, yeah definitely and [.] but it takes time because when you haven't grown up with it then you know, it's like anything else, you don't, it's harder to discern what is good from what is bad, and I think this is probably why - I mean I think I've got quite good taste anyway - [L] but I think that that is why I can't you know I can't say I of these specific artists I really like.

Do you ever listen to any of the older blues stuff then or any of the women -

I haven't, I must admit that I haven't got anything. I mean I like Billie Holliday, definitely, but I mean I think that's because I think she was probably an amazing person. But I mean also because I think she had a really sad existence, as I think probably a lot of Black people do and Black women especially. But yeah, I've got some of her music and [.] but in terms of, I mean I know as well a
10 lot of people, her music is described as jazz isn't it? Well I can't get to grips with that. I mean as far as I'm concerned I think it's blues, quite definitely, and certainly in terms of what she sings about. I mean yeah, I don't know anything about how music is actually made up and all that business, you know how you actually define what type of music is what. But when I worked at the bookshop, they sell a lot of stuff like that, so I used to listen to quite a lot there, but I mean that's ended since I've left.

20 Have you ever been tempted to try and write for music then?

Oh no, no, [L] mainly I think because I haven't even considered it. But if I was to I think it would be very difficult because I can't read music, I can't write it, and I can't play any instruments. [L] So! But I mean that is an interesting aspect. It isn't, I mean it isn't really anything that does attract me though. No, I don't think I could actually, cos if I was to write for music I would

you know, it wouldn't be like I could write a song, just the words, and have someone else who was into music, who could write it and so on, put music to it because you know, whatever they wrote wouldn't be right. I'd have to be able to write it as well.

So you want to either do the whole thing or not at all. Definitely.

Right, who do you talk about this kind of stuff with now that you're not going to a writers' group as regularly, I
10 mean do you have friends that you talk about reading or writing with?

Not really. I mean [P] I'd say, yeah I'd say not at all. But [.] although there is, I mean I have got a friend who has mentioned that he is thinking of starting a group, well he is starting a group and he, I think he mentioned, he asked me if I would be interested. And I think that they've only met about once, but I didn't go because I don't know I couldn't make it or something. So I mean
20 yeah, that would, that is something that I'm thinking about. But I just find it hard to make that commitment to actually go to -

Yeah when it comes down to the once a week thing.

Yeah, I mean I think I am having a bit of a - I mean having said you know what I said about you know, stereotypes that people have of writers who are really kind of isolated and everything, I think I am like that in terms of writing. You know I prefer, I think I do prefer to sit down and do my own thing and then just read it to - I mean

I'll show it to people and ask them what they think but I don't do that in any formal way.

So you don't find it a problem not being part of the group, like your writing doesn't drop off?

No, I mean it's you know my writing just fluctuates as I live really. You know sometimes I just seem to write loads and other times not as much.

Can you pinpoint any pattern to it, or any reasons or does it just seem fairly at random?

- 10 Well I haven't identified a pattern as yet. [L] But I mean that's like asking if you've got the answer to life I think. [L] There isn't no there isn't any pattern at all you see, because I think it's just about the way that human beings work, and although you know, like medical people and scientists and this sort of thing would like to put patterns on the way that we are and the way that we work, I don't really think it is possible or feasible. I mean you can sort of do that very broadly and say you know it's like this astrology business. I think that that works
- 20 on the same thing but you know, in terms of the way people work, no, everyone's different, and there aren't any patterns to the way that we work.

So there isn't like a mood that you tend to write? Cos a lot of people say they write more or better when they're depressed or if they're in a good mood.

No, I mean cos I keep a diary as well, and it isn't

something that I write in every day because it would just, I think it would be very mundane. So in with the diary, that definitely depends on moods, cos I tend to write mainly if I'm feeling bad or depressed or whatever, and then you know other times I just don't bother and - unless sometimes I think, oh something really good's just happened and why don't I write about it in my diary, and it's just weird because I don't. I mean occasionally I sort of force myself but usually it's only if I feel bad.

10 And with the poetry though I don't, I can't really see that there's any pattern to it, at all. Sometimes if I feel bad, I'll write loads but other times you know writing's the last thing I want to do.

D'you ever write out of anger, I mean like you said about talking about racism [?] sometimes there's an incident and you come home -

Yeah, yeah I just sort of - I mean I can just sort what I could do then is I probably wouldn't write it while I was angry but I'd just write say one line so that I could
20 remember what it is that I'm thinking about, and then I'd go back and write it later.

When you write d'you tend to rework things or d'you come out with a version and that's it?

Most of the time I rework it, but you know, very rarely I'll just write something and I'll decide that's it, and you know, I sort of go back to it but you know still decide that's it and leave it.

So d'you have like a finished version of things and you think that's it now, after you've reworked it for a while, or d'you tend to come back you know and sort of fiddle around, keep changing them?

No, once I've like once I've finished my fiddling about with it then yeah, I will have a finished version. And I mean like sometimes I'm aware that it may not be particularly well written or you know, some of the words that I use may, I don't know, they may seem a bit awkward or not
10 quite right but if I might feel that that is how I want it to stay, so that I don't lose the actual feeling that I'm trying to portray. So you know cos I don't, you know I don't want to sort of get into making the work too tailored and you know, like too professional if you like. I just want it to be as it is, as much as possible.

So you feel like it could lose some of the power if you keep polishing it?

Yeah, definitely.

Right, let's start talking about you being involved with a
20 child. I mean has that made you think about your writing at all in a different way? Have you started thinking about kids' responses or anything?

I have thought about trying to write stuff for children.

Was that before or after?

That was before. I mean I think it is an incredibly difficult thing to do, to actually write children's poetry because you've got to try and get inside their minds, and

you know know, what interests them and you know, what makes them bored and what makes them laugh and what makes them sad. And it isn't necessarily the same thing that we as adults would respond to. But I mean I think as Kehinde gets older, that I will find that easier to do because you know, just as a parent out of necessity needs to know what makes them respond and so on and how to do it. So yeah, I mean I am quite interested to sort of write stuff and let her read it and you know, see what she thinks. But also as
10 well you know, it means - I mean I've got nephews and one niece and [L] I had to think then and [L] I think it's nice to have children in the family, because it means that you can have the chance to get a look at children's books and it's just amazing like the sort of stuff that's around nowadays [...]

D'you ever wish it had been around, d'you think like, oh God why wasn't it -

Oh God definitely, yeah definitely. [L] I mean it's, yeah it's quite amazing the sort of things that you can get
20 now. And I mean it's interesting as well, not just in terms of who is portrayed and how they're portrayed, but also the way you know, looking at the ways that people write for children, cos I think it's something that I'd be able to learn a lot from. But I mean there's nothing like you know, sort of doing it first hand. But I mean the question is will she want to read what I've written? [L]
"No, go away I want to go and play football." [L]
Yeah exactly. [L]

So I mean d'you find that the childcare takes time away from writing?

Well, I think that's part of it you know, part of the lack of time element for writing. But [P] I mean then again, not really because you learn, you just learn how to adapt your life. So I mean because she's still quite young, it means that she sleeps a lot. So you know if there's something like writing I need to sort of sit down and not have any hassles going on, so you know, when she needs to
10 sleep I'll put her down and then I'll make a point of doing it. But I mean I think I'm quite lucky because I don't have to you know, I'm not just the sole person responsible for looking after her, so that is obviously a big help.

So has she, would you say she's been a positive sort of thing in terms of your life generally?

God, what a question. [L] Well yes and no, because I mean it's like as an experience that cannot be described [L] unless you've actually been through it, and you know it's
20 just a learning experience, everything is and you know it's nice to add more experiences to your life. But I mean also just in terms of you know, you have like a whole range of different feelings that you wouldn't have if there wasn't a child around or you know, if you didn't have extra responsibilities and so on. So there's that element as well.

Have you found that's come through in your writing at all,

has it changed the sorts of things that you're looking at? I don't know that it has yet, because I mean I feel that you know, like all the issues that I write about, have remained unchanged and that the thing that will change will be when I try to you know, seriously sit down and write something that a child would enjoy. Cos I would like you know, to write stuff which a child who is very young but has just learnt to read could read and you know, enjoy and get to grips with and so on.

10 Right, well that's the end of my bits of paper. Is there anything else that you think I've missed out on, any points that you wanna make yourself?

I don't think so, no.

III Notes

1) At this point Marsha indicates the built-in bookshelves lining some of the walls of room.

2) Grassroots was at the time of the interview the name of Manchester's radical bookshop.

3) Marsha is trying to find the book she is referring to in the shelves behind her.

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